Rugby League Silk Cut Challenge Cup final: Bradford Bulls 32 St Helens 40

Saints take rampaging Bulls by the horns

Paul Fitzpatrick at Wembley

BEFORE Saturday, when Bradford's young captain Robbie Paul deservedly took the honour, no one since David Topliss had won the Lance Todd Trophy for the Challenge Cup final's best player and finished on the losing side.

The workaholic Topliss had done his best to inspire Wakefield Trinity against Widnes in 1979, but that was one of Wembley's more mean-spirited years; a dour low-scoring final was characterised by the most un-rugby league like action of Bill Kirkbride, the Trinity coach, who at the end locked his players in (and the press out) of the dressing room.

The contrast with Saturday could not have been greater. Doors were open everywhere, including a few in the respective defences, and the sunshine streamed in. Expansive is hardly the word. The previous highest aggregate of points — 52 in the Wigan-Hull final of 1985 — was swamped.

Even on a hot day there was no pause for breath; the excitement was unremitting and the plot in doubt until the end; and for Paul there was the unique achievement of scoring three tries in a Wembley final, a feat that earned him a cool £10,000 from the sponsor.

That particular barrier was bound to fall some time but it was probably no coincidence that it should fall on Saturday. Summer rugby, hard grounds and the 10-metre rule offer a recipe for scoring orgies. But is there a danger of saturation?



Gripping stuff . . . Anthony Sullivan, of St Helens, is brought down to earth by Bradford's Karl Fairbank in one of Wembley's most memorable Challenge Cup finals PHOTOGRAPH: DAN SMITH

Anyone watching the code for the first time on Saturday could not have failed to be captivated by the quality of the touchdowns, 13 of them, and the pace, skill, discipline and physical honesty of it all. But the game needs to guard against a devaluation of the try.

Not that there was anything base about Master Paul's three scores. They were brilliantly taken, the last one the result of an audacious piece of individualism. The Paul brothers, Bradford's Robbie and Wigan's Henry, have barely begun their careers but they look destined for a place among the immortals.

Robbie might well have had a winner's medal to go with his other booty had it not been for a horrendous spell in the second half when Bradford saw a winning position of 26-12 evaporate.

Brian Smith, Bradford's coach, talked a lot afterwards about pain, about its refining qualities and about the character to cope with it. Poor Nathan Graham knows exactly what he was on about.

Early in the second half the Bulls' full-back, far from fulfilling pre-match predictions as a potential weakness, was in the running for the Lance Todd. Then, in seven mortifying minutes, he was transformed into as forlorn and as solitary a figure as Don Fox, the man who famously missed from in front of the posts in 1968.

Three times Graham failed to defuse high "bombs" put up with wicked precision by Bobbie Goulding, the Saints' scrum-half and captain. Cunningham, Booth and Pickavance were the beneficiaries of Graham's misfortune and, with Goulding suddenly finding place-kicking a cinch, Saints turned a 14-point deficit into a four-point lead.

After only 18 minutes Steve Prescott had collected two tries and at that stage the St Helens full-back was the raging favourite for the £10,000 hat-trick prize. But by the time Bradford had worked the nerves and the errors out of their system; the argument about whether there was any case for playing Jon Hamer had become irrelevant; and they led 14-12 with fine tries from Scales and Paul and three goals from the impeccable Cook.

Few Wembley finals have swung so violently as this one in the second half, and even when Perelini crashed through for Saints' eighth try five minutes from time the favourites could not be sure that the brave Bulls did not have a final charge left.

But for Saints and their followers this was rich compensation for the deep disappointments of 1987, 1989 and 1991. Their coach, Shaun McRae, said: "The point now is that it should not be a one-off. We want to do well in the Super League and come back here next year and defend this title."

Saints, the Super League leaders, will now concentrate on holding off Wigan's challenge over the remaining 17 weekends of the first summer Rugby League season.

Cryptic crossword by Gordius

Across

1 Drunk on brewer's liquor, politician enters excellent defence (10, 5)
9 Lost reptile brought back by no fellow on Lammas Day (9)
10 Twenty pesetas will include all sorts (5)
11 Symbolic reflection one found in bed (7)
12 Class remains undisciplined (7)
13 Bird feared by Euro-sceptics? (3)
14 Publicity avoids involving Diana's initial . . . (7)
17 . . . failure to answer charge of strong emotional involvement (7)
19 Love? Give us a ring about it — we've no feelings (7)
22 One who may expect some refusal to start granting easy entry (7)
24 Was she taken from Adam? (3)
25 With 17, turning us into byways . . . (7)
26 . . . and not therein, for a change (7)
28 They say it's light to lift (5)
29 Quango to consider military equipment? (5,4)
30 Priest wagged finger at alternative entertainer (15)

Down

1 When it's fixed the time is at hand (5, 5, 5)
2 Insult to west country town's not on (5)
3 First mount overtaken by similar one near Lewes (7)
4 Signs of power? (7)
5 Turpin's push-over also included accompanying words (5,2)
6 Diana merits a break (7)
7 Threatening child with finality (9)
8 He hopes to have business for life (9,6)
15 English advanced in vain before mating call (9)
16 A letter from 2 . . . (3)
18 . . . but first a drink (3)
20 To work fast is beneath the fashionable rich (7)
21 Greeted with a bit of luck instead for a change (7)
22 Called family in to establish pecking order (7)
23 Unofficial strike after leading fireman holds the sheet (7)
27 Organ featured in 15 (5)

Last week's solution

Rugby Union Courage League One: Bath 38 Sale 38

Sale push Bath to limit

Mick Cleary

SO WHAT, if Leicester's defeat handed the Courage championship to Bath on a plate! News of that upset filtered through only seconds before the final whistle. By that point we had been treated to an afternoon of dramatic rugby.

And there was more to come. Sale winger Yates went over in the second minute of injury time, Liley converted and the scores were level. As the final whistle blew, some Bath players were unaware of the result from Welford Road.

No wonder they looked so relieved. There were many who had come to a packed, sun-drenched Recreation Ground, expecting to see Bath's marathon slog to the title end with a festive, carefree fun-run.

The team were willing to play ball; unfortunately the opposition wanted a piece of the action, too. Sale were lively, imaginative and thrillingly combative to the end. As they ate into Bath's lead in the second half, the home side became fretful, occasionally fractious and lacking in their customary poise and rhythm.

They did enough — just. This is their sixth league title, and they now prepare for the Cup final and a possible fourth double. Hats off to Sale, too, who merit their own high standing of sixth in the league.

There's a temptation merely to flick through the usual volume of plaudits in saluting Bath's achievement. They are thorough, committed, hard-edged and multi-talented. But their greatest asset is their desire to excel, to challenge themselves and to change. They have moved their game on to another dimension this season, creating fluid and complex patterns. Here, too, they were intent on showing this all-round ability. For much of the first half it seemed as if we were in for yet another spectacular.

But injuries to first Guscott and then Nicol seemed to disturb their equilibrium. Without the experience and steady hands of De Glanville and Dawe, both absent through injury, Bath were in the unfamiliar position of relying on young heads. The early phases had seen the likes of Adebayo, Lumsden and Catt sweeping down on the Sale line. Peters, the Scottish No 8, was also in domineering early form.

It was another Scot, however, scrum-half Nicol, who was first on the score sheet. After the ball had been through several phases, he spotted a gap to plunge through. We were all waiting for the floodgates to gently swing open and, with Catt over the try-line 10 minutes later, it seemed a reasonable bet. But it just didn't work out that way.

Callard steadied Bath nerves with two penalties but Liley retaliated with a couple himself. Then came Yates's finale before the trophy was duly presented. — *The Observer*

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Moscow exposes nine British 'spies'

James Meek in Moscow and Richard Norton-Taylor

THE MOST serious crisis in British-Russian relations since the end of the cold war loomed this week after Moscow threatened to expel nine British diplomats it accuses of spying. Britain warned Russia it planned a "significant" response if its diplomats were ordered to leave.

Russia's threat came after a triumphant announcement by the Federal Security Service (FSB) — the intelligence agency which succeeded the KGB — that it had arrested a British spy in the act of broadcasting secret information to his controllers in London.

Russia's deputy foreign minister, Sergei Krylov, confirmed that there would be expulsions, but refused on Monday to specify the number of Britons who would be ordered to pack their bags.

Grigory Karasin, Mr Krylov's spokesman, said later that the incident should not be dramatised. "Such cases sometimes happen in relations between countries," a ministry spokesman told the Interfax news agency.

The UK Foreign Secretary, Malcolm Rifkind, said there would be a "significant" response if Russia pressed ahead and expelled British diplomats. He said tit-for-tat expulsions were a possibility. "Absolutely no evidence has been given to our ambassador [Sir Andrew Wood] nor to the United Kingdom to support any allegations and, as far as we are concerned, these allegations are unjustified," he said.

Alexander Zdanovich, chief FSB spokesman, told the Itar-Tass news agency that the message handed to the British ambassador "described in detail the activity of each of the listed spies and gave documental evidence about their contacts with a Russian citizen who had been arrested for spying for Great Britain".

Interfax reported on Monday that the Russian arrested was an official who had sold London political and defence secrets after being recruited by Britain's Secret Intelligence Service (SIS).

Mr Zdanovich said the man, who has not been named, had worked for the federal government in Moscow. He was detained last month. "The arrested man had direct access to secret information and passed on to British intelligence information of a political and strategic-defence character," Mr Zdanovich said. He said the man had been recruited in the mid-1990s, and had received material reward from Britain.

The alleged spy, who is being held in Lefortovo prison, in Moscow, has been charged under article 64 of Russia's criminal code, Betrayal of the Motherland, which carries a potential death sentence. Interfax said that the agent had confessed under interrogation to spying for Britain.

In February a businessman, Nigel Shakespear, one of 11 British diplomats and journalists expelled from Moscow in 1989 when he was working as a military attaché at the embassy, was deported from Russia for the second time. Last year, a Russian journalist was asked to leave Britain.

Russian security services suspect that the relative ease with which Western businessmen come and go from Russia is being abused by overseas intelligence agencies.

Comment, page 12

Precious cargo . . . A baby is lifted up to fleeing Liberians packing a ship at Monrovia's port. About 2,000 people left on an overloaded Nigerian freighter on Sunday, heading for Ghana.

US marines opened fire to protect their embassy when fighting spread in the Liberian capital on Monday. Heavy overnight rain brought a lull on Tuesday as faction representatives and West African mediators gathered for a summit in Ghana.

The main faction leader, Charles Taylor, who has said he will not attend the peace talks, announced a unilateral ceasefire, but sporadic gunfire continued throughout Monday. PHOTOGRAPH: CORINNE DUFKA

Conservatives thrashed in local elections

Patrick Wintour and Rebecca Smithers

BRITISH Conservatives suffered their second worst performance in local election history last week. They faced nationwide reverses, including the symbolic loss to Labour of Basildon, the former citadel of Thatcherite Essex Man.

Overall, the Tories lost 573 seats, with Labour gaining control of 10 more councils, and the Liberal Democrats another seven.

Labour's performance appeared to be especially strong in the south of England, even if its overall share of the vote may have fallen to 44 per cent, down two points from last year. The Conservatives were up two points on last year to 27 points, but still trailed Labour by an unprecedented 17 points only 12 months away from the general election. Liberal Democrats, enjoying a sixth successive year of gains, trailed the Tories in overall share of the vote by just one point, a chilling figure for many Tory MPs.

Conservatives were also stung by a wipe-out on 30 councils, leaving a total of 50 — one in nine — without any Tory councillors. Big cities, including Oxford, Manchester and Newcastle, as well as key southern new towns such as Slough and Harlow, are "Tory-free zones".

The Conservative leader, John Major, made it clear he thought the party's fortunes would be boosted by the improving economy. Asked if he would consider resigning, he replied: "I am going to stay here right through the general election. I think we can win that general election. I am going to bend all my efforts to winning."

Hugo Young, page 10

Yeltsin promises poll will go ahead

David Hearst in Moscow

GENNADY Zyuganov, the Russian Communist leader and main challenger to Boris Yeltsin, has called on all candidates in next month's presidential election to sign a pact to abide by the outcome.

Mr Zyuganov made his call on Monday after a rocky 24 hours in Russian politics sparked by the suggestion by the president's chief bodyguard and closest political confidant, Lieutenant-General Alexander Korzhakov, that the election be postponed. Gen Korzhakov claimed the vote could lead to a civil war.

Gen Korzhakov was overruled by Mr Yeltsin who said on Monday the election would go ahead. But Mr Yeltsin characteristically muddied the waters by conceding the general was not alone in believing a Communist victory could spark turmoil.

The president's pledge was swiftly welcomed by the Clinton administration. "We've stressed the importance of the June 16 election and the certainty of the democratic process," the White House spokesman, Mike McCurry, declared. Whether the Communists were returned to power, was "a question for the Russian people to address in a free and fair election".

Speaking in Bonn, Mr Zyuganov said: "We must guarantee the elections are carried out in a strictly democratic, honest and legal fashion, and at the same time sit around a table with all the parties and movements and sign an agreement that the outcome of the election, as expressed by voters, will be sacred."

Earlier, Mr Yeltsin was anything but convincing about his pledge to respect the wisdom of Russian voters. "Korzhakov is not alone in thinking that a victory of Zyuganov would be the start of a civil war," he said.

In a separate interview with the Russian business magazine Delovye Lyudy, he likened the possibility of Mr Zyuganov taking power to the Bolshevik revolution.

"I would not say today that the process of reform has gone so far that it cannot be reversed," Mr Yeltsin warned. "I am convinced that they [the Communists] are preparing to act without any limitations, like what happened after 1917."

The Communist chairman of the lower house of parliament, Gennady Seleznyov, said there were no grounds to delay the poll and accused Mr Yeltsin of "rocking the boat".

Vladimir Lukin, a founding member of the Yabloko party, whose leader, Grigory Yavlinsky, is also a candidate for the presidency, said Gen Korzhakov's remarks "smell of intrigue". The extreme nationalist, Vladimir Zhirinovsky, said: "The authorities understand that they are losing."

Mr Yeltsin's clique of advisers has every reason to fear a change in Kremlin management, not least because they know how easily, in the past he has come to pragmatic deals with his political opponents. A recent meeting with Mr Yavlinsky has sparked rumours that Mr Yeltsin offered him the post of prime minister in return for his support.

Mr Yeltsin is still trailing by six points in the opinion polls, having made up much lost ground. But his populist promise, made in Yekaterinburg a month ago, to pay off the entire backlog of unpaid wages in March, has not worked. Only 20 per cent of the arrears have been paid, and Mr Yeltsin continues to face a hostile reception from pensioners.

● Mr Yeltsin has invited separatist Chechen field commanders to talks with Russia's prime minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, and the Moscow-backed leader of Chechenia, Doku Zavgayev.

Austria	AS30	Malta	45c
Belgium	BF75	Netherlands	G 4.75
Denmark	DK16	Norway	NK 16
Finland	FM 10	Portugal	E300
France	FF 13	Saudi Arabia	SR 6.50
Germany	DM 4	Spain	P 300
Greece	DR 400	Sweden	SK 19
Italy	L 3,000	Switzerland	SF 3.30

Poverty causes famine, not a shortage of food

I FOUND your Environment section (April 28) particularly depressing reading. But not, as you might think, because I feared its imminent, doom-laden predictions. Unfortunately, it was the litany of Malthusian myth and factual error which affected my demeanour.

John Adams claims to have used a tonne of aviation fuel to get to Vancouver (he must have been the only person on the plane). Strangely enough, it is the most technologically advanced nations which have done most to preserve their environments and address social inequalities: rather the reverse of what he suggests.

Tim Radford then predicts a crisis in food production — despite continual excesses in world supply over demand in the past 20 years. Famine, in case you didn't know, is caused by poverty, not lack of food. Singaporeans do not starve (yet they produce little food), but food exports from Ireland or Ethiopia did not mean the people could afford to eat.

He then includes the extraordinary statement that oil supplies will run out in 50 years — known reserves continue to grow, the price continues to fall.

Finally, he rounds off a piece on water by suggesting that there is "no substitute". When I last looked, 70 per cent of the Earth's surface was water. It can be (and in many countries is) desalinated. This is expensive, but an expensive substitute is still a substitute.

It seems that "greens" have quite literally taken upon themselves the role of religious revivalists: perhaps in the traditions of Hebraic prophets or Puritans. The key elements of this are: ominous warnings of divine retribution (in this case, ecological or social catastrophe); a censorious attitude to the things that most people enjoy; and the promise of salvation if these things are renounced.

It makes it all too easy to dismiss their message when facts are subordinated to the requirements of this unholy trinity. This is a pity, because some important messages get lost. If environmental issues are to be taken seriously, they will have to be discussed in a more clear-headed way.
Tom Marshall,
Copenhagen, Denmark

IT IS very refreshing to see the articles in the Environment section (April 28). But why are these articles stuck together in a special section on their own as though they had no relevance to anything else in the paper?

Why are the considerations in these articles not allowed to influence the orthodox deregulation-global market-"sustainable" growth slant which informs most of the rest of the articles and analysis in the Weekly, week in, week out?
(Dr) John Leonard,
Woden, ACT, Australia

TIM RADFORD (Why meat will soon be off the menu, April 28) writes about the expanding population of the undeveloped world (where a couple's prestige and pension depend on many sons), but is mistaken in expecting the population of the United States to double.

Nowhere in the overdeveloped world (where a wife must work to pay the mortgage) does the average size of women's completed families reach the 2.2 necessary to keep up the present population. This applies to the US, Japan, the Tiger economies, and all of Europe, both East and West. Italian women, for example, average only 1.6 children.

The ageing populations of these countries will still grow a little as old people like myself live a little longer than our parents did, but then the populations will reduce. As further countries become industrialised they too will exchange expanding population for the novel problems of declining population.
Geoff Leet,
Thurso, Scotland

American view of the world

THE problem with Americans, particularly those living in Japan, is that they think they're the only country of any worth in the world. While Americans are failing to build sound relationships with the Japanese, the Japanese are (albeit slowly) building relationships with more than just Americans.

Americans in Japan who are ignorant of anything but themselves are a recurring source of annoyance to us non-Americans in Japan. To that end, the Japanese government's JET programme brings over 4,000 people from English-speaking countries as well as China, Korea, Brazil, France, Germany and others; not just "2,000 young Americans" (Washington Post, April 28).

The sooner Americans learn a little more about the world in which they supposedly enjoy superpower status, the sooner the Japanese (and the rest of us) will stop referring to "bloody Americans".
Shreekant Raivadera,
British JET, Aomori, Japan

PETER MORGAN of Barbados (April 7) wonders how we in the US can tolerate our government "being regarded as the world's Big Bully". I assume Mr Morgan has never spent any length of time here and that friends from this country are atypical.

Gore Vidal, one of our most perceptive writers, calls us the most heavily propagandised people in the world, and it's true. From an early age we're brainwashed into thinking that our country is the font of all goodness and is always acting out of altruism. They really do walk around believing this fairy tale. The very notion that we would bully someone is like Orwell's Thoughtcrime: totally outside the realm of possible consideration for most US citizens.

The US media is heavily controlled by the military-industrial complex that also controls the government. In addition, large amounts are spent to promote jingoism, xenophobia and anti-intellectualism in a continuous dumbing-down of our population.

This self-enforced, aggressive ignorance is the source of all our problems, as well as those problems we so frequently cause other countries.
Chris Sorochin,
Port Jefferson, New York, USA

Distant songs of England

I NOTE with some alarm the recent decline in British songbirds (Comment, April 28). These statistics reinforce the noticeable increase in the silence of the English countryside found on recent visits to the UK.

Ironically, many of these same species have enjoyed notable success when transplanted overseas. For example, skylarks appear to be reaching almost pest proportions in the tablelands of New South Wales, Australia, and I observed more song thrushes on a recent visit to New Zealand than on several trips to the UK.

Although numerous theories exist for the growth of introduced species in the absence of their natural predators, the increase of these populations must also to some extent reflect their adaptability to changing (if also deforested) environments. In this respect the decline of such species in the face of changing agricultural practices in the UK is all the more worrying. We can only hope that the recent emphasis on sustainable agriculture and the search for more pest-specific pesticides will again make our countryside more "bird friendly".

Many of these species were introduced to Australia and New Zealand by ill-informed "acclimatisation societies". Although the aim of these societies must have been to make their newfound homes more "English", few could have predicted that their avifauna could eventually become more English than England itself.
Richard ffrench-Constant,
Canberra, Australia

Chilly warning to emigrants

TO BRITS considering emigrating to Australia after reading Catherine Bennett's article (April 28): the climate is not beautiful. Don't be deceived by travel agents, or Australian soapies; even in South Queensland sea-bathing is a chilly business; in arctic Victoria there are not four neat seasons, but at least six months of relentless cold and wet, and buildings seldom have adequate heating, the inhabitants being firmly convinced they live in a tropical climate. "Summer" can be grey and icy too.

Look at Australia on the map ("what an ugly shape", as Oscar Wilde remarked). How could such a big continent have just one climate?

And since it elected a "Liberal" government two months ago, Australia has voted itself savage cuts to jobs and welfare. The grass is not greener over here.
Rosemary Evans,
St Kilda, Victoria, Australia

UN democracy?

VICTORIA BRITTAIN (The UN needs a fresh leader, April 28) raises an important question: who is to be the next secretary-general? There is another, equally critical, question. How is he or she to be chosen?

Article 97 of the UN Charter says only that "the Secretary-General shall be appointed by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council". The present system of secret lobbying is not immutable.

The UK government would do the world a service if it raised the issue in Parliament and canvassed the views of NGOs, which have consultative status with the UN. It's time to introduce the UN to democracy.
Bruce Kent,
Forum for UN Renewal, London

Briefly

HAVING had to waste hours of my time on Handke in the course of reading for an external German degree, I was deeply shocked to find that the Guardian Weekly has wasted one of its so valuable pages on this Austrian bore (April 28).

He is one of that race of pseudo-intellectuals who persuade people who do not like "accepted wisdom" that anything which goes against that wisdom is necessarily correct. Handke's uncritical defence of all things Serbian — which includes large numbers of massacres in the last few years — is typical of his woolly, affected way of drawing attention to himself.
N A Metcalfe,
St Blasien, Germany

I SEE that the United States has restated its list of nations that are supposed to be guilty of "state-supported terrorism": Cuba, North Korea, Sudan, Libya, Iraq, Iran and Syria. Many of us were taught that modesty is a virtue but I really do think that the United States should not be so concerned about immodesty as to leave itself off the list.
John Gittins,
University of Toronto, Canada

REGARDING your Washington Post article about the death of Jessica Dubroff (April 21), I cannot believe that a child would forcibly insist on taking off in adverse conditions, and that the two adults in the plane would defer to her decision.

Instead of passing legislation against juvenile pilots, why not pass a law that would stop self-serving, egotistical, idiotic adults from flying?
Ann Ashley,
Vancouver, BC, Canada

I CAN understand that a country wants to preserve its identity, but I find it a little odd that Great Britain, a country which both politically and geographically belongs to Europe still appears to be denying the fact. Why "European ban on British beef" (as opposed to "Other members of the European Union" or even "Continental")?
Wim Pol,
The Netherlands

MANY a transportation magnate, including Paul Martin, Canada's finance minister, has ships registered in Liberia. While the current civil war is under way, are ships' registration fees being collected? If so, who do they benefit? Do they amount to enough to make a difference? Or are they, in fact, a factitious; indeed a flagicious, fiction functioning in the final analysis as a fragmentiser of the fractious factions?
David Walmsley,
Vancouver, Canada

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Nationalists in India poised for success

Suzanne Goldenberg in New Delhi

INDIANS voted in the last main round of general elections on Tuesday, and while they are unlikely to deliver a decisive verdict, they have signalled growing support for a rightwing Hindu party once confined to the margins of public life.

Opinion polls have been saying the Bharatiya Janata Party will win most seats in what will probably be a hung parliament. The party, which has struggled for acceptance as a credible alternative to the ruling Congress, is at last being seen as a potential party of government.

A poll in the Times of India at the weekend, however, suggests that the BJP's surge has lost steam. Muslims and other communities, alarmed at the prospect of a BJP government, are throwing their support behind anyone with a chance of beating the party's candidates.

The BJP has tried recently to ingratiate itself with Muslims. But it is still seen as the party which provoked the wave of religious fervour that led to the destruction of a historic mosque in Ayodhya in December 1992. Dalits (formerly "untouchables") and low-caste Hindus also seem unimpressed by the BJP's efforts to win them over.



People queue to vote in Moradabad in India's northern state of Uttar Pradesh PHOTOGRAPH: KAMAL KISHORE

The poll gave the Congress 169 seats, the BJP 165, and the National Front-Left Front alliance of regional parties 145 seats in the 543-seat parliament.

Sundar Singh Bhandari, the BJP's vice-president, said the party was determined to try to form a government by roping in regional allies. Unallied regional parties will be crucial in forming the government.

The past 12 years have seen a spectacular rise in the fortunes of the BJP, which was previously shunned for its association with the Hindu fanatics who assassinated Mahatma Gandhi in 1948. It won only two seats in the 1984 elections, but had 119 MPs in the last parliament.

The party's rise represents a backlash by Brahmins and other upper-caste Hindus against affirmative action programmes for Dalit and low-caste Hindus. "This unprecedented anger was encouraged by the BJP and used by the BJP to consolidate their hold on the Hindu upper castes," said Purushotam Aggarwal, an associate professor at Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University. "The BJP will continue to be a significant force in Indian society because it represents the vested interests of Hindu society."

Unlike the Congress, which has promised to carry on with economic reforms begun in 1991, the BJP is ambivalent about the entry of foreign firms into India's markets.

Spain's PM prescribes austerity

Adela Gooch in Madrid

SPAIN'S new conservative prime minister, José María Aznar, was sworn in at the weekend, bringing the first change in government in almost 14 years.

The cabinet he named includes two independents as defence and justice ministers, and a balance of spenders and slashers in economics, which he says will be his priority.

Last week he outlined a tough programme of financial austerity, less bureaucracy and greater backing for business — aimed at meeting European monetary union targets.

Mr Aznar, leader of the centre-right Popular Party (PP), insisted that some key institutions, including the legal system, state television and civil service, needed to be changed to fight corruption and safeguard democracy.

He was voted into office with Catalan, Basque and Canary Island MPs providing the majority that he failed to achieve in the general election on March 3.

In a parliamentary debate, Mr Aznar said his priorities would be to slash spending and encourage growth as first steps towards reducing unemployment — the highest in the European Union — and to curb the budget deficit.

He insisted he would protect the welfare system guaranteeing health care and pensions. But his references to privatisation, tax reforms, and changes to labour laws, making it easier to dismiss workers, will not please the unions. They have warned they will fight attempts to cut welfare benefits.

He stressed that he was committed to reducing the budget deficit from 5.9 per cent to 3 per cent by 1997. Most economists believe it will be virtually impossible to do this merely by fighting fraud and reducing administration costs.

Even if the annual growth targets of 3 per cent are met, Mr Aznar will almost certainly have to trim welfare costs and is said to be considering introducing charges for health care.

Corruption, which brought the defeat of his Socialist predecessor, Felipe González, also figured. Mr Aznar said his administration would account "for every peseta".

He had a stern warning for Britain. His administration would be tough on "drug trafficking and money laundering in Gibraltar", he said, and would press Spanish claims to the Rock with vigour.

Australia aims to curb TV violence

Bradley Perrett in Canberra

AUSTRALIAN politicians called on Monday for a crackdown on violent television and video games as well as tighter gun controls following last week's massacre in Tasmania which left 35 people dead.

The prime minister, John Howard, told parliament the federal government wanted a national ban on all automatic and semi-automatic guns, allowing a six-month amnesty for owners to surrender them and mandatory jail for those who do not.

But the new gun laws to be worked out with state leaders this week would not be the only solution, he said. "The causes of that dreadful event lie deeper than simply the inadequacy of our gun control laws," Mr Howard said. "They go to aspects of the kind of society we are, they go to issues concerning violence on the screen and in videos. They also . . . raise legitimate questions about contemporary attitudes towards the treatment of mental health problems."

A gunman armed with a high-powered rifle killed 35 people at the historic Port Arthur convict site 50km southeast of Hobart in Tasmania. It was Australia's worst mass murder since atrocities committed against Aborigines last century.

The Queensland state police minister, Russell Cooper, from the conservative National Party, also called for investigations of violent television. "We have to be looking at those things as well because I think it does upset people's minds in many respects," he said. — *Reuter*

Comment, page 12

Calls for land-mines ban ignored

Owen Bennett Jones in Geneva

TWO years of international negotiations ended last week with failure to secure a global ban on the use of land-mines. Despite agreement on new restrictions, the United Nations secretary general, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, described the outcome as deeply disappointing.

An inter-governmental conference revising the 1980 UN Conventional Weapons Convention outlawed undetectable anti-personnel mines and put restrictions on the use of other "smarter" mines, but a total ban on anti-personnel mines — sought by more than 30 governments, the UN and the Red Cross — will have to wait.

"The next review conference of this convention will take place in five years' time," Dr Boutros-Ghali said. "Our estimate is that, by the year 2001, an additional 50,000 human beings will have been killed and a further 80,000 injured by land-mines."

The UN leader's strongly worded attack was backed up by non-governmental organisations, which described the final text agreed at the conference as an outrage.

Tim Carstairs of Britain's Working Group on Land-mines — which includes agencies such as Oxfam and Save the Children — attacked it as a mine-layer's charter.

However, Johan Molander, who chaired the negotiations, said the final text was a modest step towards a total ban. In nine years all land-mines must either be clearly marked or fitted with a device making them self-destruct or deactivate within 120 days. All mines will also have to contain eight grams of iron so that they are detectable with "commonly available equipment". For the first time, the rules governing the use of mines will apply in internal as well as in international conflicts.

But anti-mine campaigners believe these are tiny gains, and could be counter-productive. They argue that, by legitimising the use of self-destructing weapons, the treaty will encourage the production of a new generation of hi-tech mines.

They also claim mines have never been an effective weapon. A number of senior military officers, including the leader of the United States military campaign in the Gulf war, General Norman Schwarzkopf, have publicly stated that mines do not serve any useful military purpose.

More than 30 countries, including Britain, now say that they want a total ban. But most reserve the right to use mines until an international ban is agreed. Others, notably China and Russia, say that they still consider mines to be a legitimate weapon which can help defend their troops.

As many as 20,000 people are blown up by land-mines each year — the vast majority civilians. While many victims die, most lose limbs. There is also a high risk that they can be blinded as well. Children are particularly at risk because they play in places where no adult has been, and where there are still active mines.

UN agencies estimate that there are currently 100 million mines laid in 68 countries.

Delegates at the Geneva conference observed one minute's silence to honour the estimated 14,586 people killed or maimed since last October, when the new land-mine protocol was initially scheduled to be adopted.

David Fairhall adds: Nato has responded favourably to an appeal from Labour's shadow defence secretary, David Clark, to apply its military expertise to the humanitarian problem of clearing land-mines.

Bossi puts boot into Italian state

John Hooper in Rome

IN TYPICALLY flamboyant yet subtly equivocal fashion, Umberto Bossi, the leader of the Northern League, has put the future of Italy's rich north back at the top of the political agenda only weeks after a general election threatened to sideline his movement.

Politicians of the left and right have expressed outrage about a speech by Mr Bossi at the weekend urging a peaceful, Czechoslovak-style break-up of Italy. "The time has come to sit down around a table to divide up the country," he declared.

Mr Bossi was addressing the self-styled Mantua parliament, a convention of the League's representatives to the Rome legislature that has taken on many of the airs of a constituent assembly since its formation last year. At the weekend, the "parliament" approved a motion which is thought to have endorsed the "right to self-determination of the people of Padania [Mr Bossi's name for the north]" and their "right of resistance" to laws or rules that stand in the way of their advancement.

The resolution also approved the creation of an umbrella group — the Padania Liberation Committee — and opened the way for the election of a 10-strong "government" by the next session of the parliament.

Romano Prodi, the man who is most likely to be Italy's new prime minister, said Mr Bossi's remarks were "terrible". The Pope, on a pastoral visit to the north, begged Roman Catholics to work for the "common good of the entire national community".

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The Week

PRESIDENT Nelson Mandela defused a threatened crisis in South Africa by persuading Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi to accept a month's postponement of local elections in KwaZulu-Natal. But the main political parties are in a deadlock over a new constitution.
Martin Woollacott, page 12

NIGERIA'S military rulers have retired dozens of air force and navy officers a few weeks after scores of army officers were swept out.

BAT industries, the tobacco and financial services combine, said booming cigarette sales had helped boost profits for the year to $900 million — a 16 per cent jump.

THE leftwing Sandinista National Liberation Front overwhelmingly picked the former president, Daniel Ortega, as its presidential candidate for Nicaragua's general elections on October 20.

PRESIDENT Clinton is to bypass Congress and use his executive power to impose a reform that would slash welfare for teenage mothers who leave home and drop out of school.
Washington Post, page 16

A RED CROSS official and a doctor visited 11 hostages held since January by separatist rebels in Indonesia's Irian Jaya province.

ETHNIC tensions in Burundi heightened following reports of a massacre of 235 Hutu civilians by the mostly Tutsi army.

THE US Senate passed a bill to crack down on illegal immigrants at the border and in the workplace, and stiffen rules to keep them off welfare benefits.

LIU GANG, one of the most prominent pro-democracy dissidents to flee China, has been granted permission to stay temporarily in the US.

A WAVE of arson attacks hit Bahrain, destroying two shopping malls and badly damaging other buildings in an escalation of anti-government protests.

VOTERS in the eastern German state of Brandenburg snubbed Berlin and decided to reject a merger with the future capital to form a federal state.

THE body of the former CIA chief, William Colby, was washed ashore on a river bank south of Washington, nine days after neighbours reported him missing.

RUSSIA has arrested a scientist in Siberia for manufacturing and smuggling nuclear material abroad.

Balkans refugee 'tax' angers Germany

Ian Traynor in Bonn

THE governments of Bosnia and Serbia are seeking to capitalise on the plight of hundreds of thousands of Balkan refugees sheltering in Germany by demanding payment to allow them to return home, according to government and relief organisation officials in Bonn.

Manfred Kanther, Germany's tough-talking interior minister, said the Bosnian government was blocking negotiations on repatriation between Bonn and Sarajevo and demanding payment for the proposed returnees.

Local authority leaders in government-controlled parts of Bosnia — almost all under the control of President Alija Izetbegovic's ruling Muslim Democratic Action Party — were stipulating that each returnee from Germany bring "taxes" of up to DM10,000 ($6,600), a well-placed aid official disclosed.

There are at least 320,000 refugees from the war in Germany, about 7.5 per cent of Bosnia's pre-war population and a figure that eclipses the number of Bosnians scattered across the rest of the European Union.

Mr Kanther is anxious to see them begin to return, arguing that they are testing the limits of German generosity and hospitality. But he was forced to concede last week that his deadline of July 1 for the beginning of deportations was no longer practicable, given the fragile condition of the Bosnian peace process and the halting pace of the civilian reconstruction effort.

Mr Kanther also attacked the Serbian government of President Slobodan Milosevic for blocking the return of thousands of other migrants to Germany, and for trying to exact payment for co-operation.

Ethnic Albanians from the tense Serbian province of Kosovo are pouring into Germany at the rate of more than 2,000 a month, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

There are now thought to be at least 130,000 Kosovo Albanians in Germany who are not war refugees but mostly failed asylum-seekers. The German authorities want to deport them, but Serbia refuses to take them back.

Mr Kanther also accused Croatia of being in cahoots with Bosnia's government in seeking to block repatriation.

Germany needs transit agreements with Austria, Slovenia and Croatia to begin sending the Bosnians home since the vast majority of them will travel overland.

The government of President Franjo Tudjman in Croatia is bent on delaying an influx of Muslims into Bosnia because this would tip the ethnic balance of the Muslim-Croat federation established in half of Bosnia-Herzegovina in the Muslims' favour.

A confidential German foreign ministry report that helped Mr Kanther decide to delay ejecting the Bosnians warned that a mass return of refugees from abroad could sink the ailing federation.

A durable coexistence of Muslims and Croats in a common federation was "far from assured", the report warned. The return of refugees was meeting "massive resistance from local Croats". The report envisaged a bleak future for Bosnia and anticipated the persecution of non-Serbs returning to areas under Serb control.

The UNHCR estimates that as many as 70 per cent of the 320,000 Bosnian refugees in Germany are Muslim victims of Serb ethnic cleansing, drummed out of their lands in areas now under Serb control.

Most will be unable to return to their native areas and will need to be accommodated in the Muslim-Croat federation, but that plan is generating fierce Croat opposition.

Officials from the five-power "contact group" on Bosnia — the United States, Russia, Germany, France and Britain — met in Frankfurt on Sunday to discuss the refugee crisis. The head of the UNHCR, Sadako Ogata, began a tour of Bosnian hotspots on Sunday in an attempt to galvanise the repatriation process.

Washington Post, page 15



Held back . . . Police rescue a Vietnamese child whose mother tried to jump with her from a navy ship last week as Malaysia forcibly deported 126 boat people to Vietnam PHOTOGRAPH: MIKE FIALA

Nobel poet faces sex lawsuit

Martin Walker in Washington

BOSTON University is to back its star professor, the Nobel prize-winning poet Derek Walcott, and become his co-defendant at a sexual harassment trial instituted by a female former student.

The stage is set for a drama of sexual and racial politics, in which the focus will be the West Indian poet's claim that unscrupulous women find it easy to destroy the reputations of prominent men with spurious charges.

The student, in her 30s, claims Prof Walcott, aged 66, told her she would fail his course unless she had sex with him. He was reprimanded when he taught at Harvard after another female student made a similar allegation. Prof Walcott, claiming that the teaching of poetry and drama was touched by the inherent passion of the subjects, then acknowledged that his "deliberately personal and intense" style might have been misunderstood.

After a lengthy internal investigation of this latest incident, Boston University has concluded that the charges are without grounds. "We entirely believe Mr Walcott's version," officials said.

Nicole Niemi, a former television journalist, filed the charge after quitting Prof Walcott's Masters degree drama course in February. She filed a private suit for emotional distress, compensation for her university fees, and punitive damages, and is seeking more than $500,000.

Beijing fears chaos in Hong Kong

Andrew Higgins in Hong Kong

A SECRET Chinese report on the future of Hong Kong has warned the Communist Party to brace for riots, a slump in foreign investment and other perils when Britain pulls out next year, a Hong Kong magazine reported last week.

An independent Chinese-language monthly, Cheng Ming, quoted what it said was a leaked Chinese document as saying Britain would play the "democracy card" to prolong colonial influence after 1997.

The internal report was said to have been prepared by China's Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office. Its authenticity could not be confirmed, though its logic matches that of Beijing conspiracy theories.

It said "anti-Chinese and anti-communist forces" in the United States and Taiwan could stir up trouble after 1997 to undermine China's stability: "Violent and armed turmoil leading to the paralysis of Hong Kong society could occur." It predicted a drop of between 20 and 80 per cent in foreign investment.

Amid fading hopes for a smooth transfer of sovereignty, the shadow British foreign secretary, Robin Cook, on a visit to the colony pledged to help non-Chinese ethnic minorities to secure the right of abode in Britain.

He said the Labour party would press the Government to make an "unconditional" offer of sanctuary to the 3,000-5,000 people who will be effectively stateless after 1997. But he offered scant solace for the bulk of Hong Kong's 6.4 million people, rejecting more British passports for ethnic Chinese.

Meanwhile, Hong Kong's chief secretary, Anson Chan, confirmed that the colony had rejected Chinese demands for help in replacing a legislature elected under Governor Chris Patten's reforms with a body picked by Beijing. A Chinese request for "necessary" co-operation" for a provisional legislature was refused.

Peres digs in over attack on UN base

Derek Brown in Jerusalem

THE Israeli prime minister, Shimon Peres, dismissed renewed claims on Monday that Israeli gunners fired deliberately at a United Nations base in Lebanon packed with refugees.

The new accusations are backed by an amateur UN video of an Israeli unmanned spy plane flying near the Qana camp in South Lebanon as it was being pounded by artillery on April 18.

Mr Peres stuck by the Israeli army's version of events: a spy plane was flying in the vicinity but was not over the camp. "The army was very careful with its story and the army admitted when it made a mistake. We made a mistake. We are terribly sorry . . . But we insist the information that was given is correct," he said.

More than 100 Lebanese civilians died in the attack on Qana, and the much vaunted Israeli capacity for precision strikes was gravely undermined by the hideous carnage at the UN camp, in which the presence of refugees was public knowledge.

The confirmation that a pilotless "drone" was operating in the area of the camp at the time is further ammunition for critics, who say the firing was at best cynically callous, and at worst deliberate.

That the shells hit a UN post, said one senior officer in the aftermath of the massacre, was "a regrettable miss and not bad decision-making".

● Palestinian and Israeli negotiators on Monday ended their first, largely symbolic, talks on a permanent peace settlement at the Egyptian resort of Taba. The talks will resume after the Israeli general election on May 29.

Meanwhile, Israeli soldiers shot and wounded nine Palestinians in clashes with demonstrators protesting against Israeli land confiscations at the self-ruled enclave of Qalqilya in the West Bank, officials said.

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Tudjman seeks to stifle his critics

Julian Borger in Zagreb

THE CROATIAN government has intensified its campaign against critics in the press and local government, closing an independent newspaper and dissolving the opposition-led Zagreb city council last week, less than a fortnight before the country formally joins the Council of Europe, a forum for the promotion of democracy and human rights.

Panorama, a weekly tabloid, was closed by the financial police. The official reason was violation of property and environmental laws, but the decision came only days after the newspaper printed a critical profile of President Franjo Tudjman.

Two days earlier, Zagreb's city council was dissolved, after being elected last year with an opposition majority. President Tudjman had already made it clear he would not surrender control of the capital, by vetoing — on "national security" grounds — four nominee mayors put forward by the opposition.

When the Council's assembly voted to admit Croatia last week despite its patchy human rights record, European diplomats in Zagreb said the move would strengthen Croatian moderates and increase Western leverage on the government.

But a United Nations human rights monitor said that the government's recent actions demonstrated that Croatia's admittance had only served to weaken the West's influence. "The government promised the council it would make improvements on 21 points concerning human rights . . . It has done nothing — if anything the situation is worse. But they let them in. What is the point?"

The official added that when the council accepted Russia as a member in January, it forfeited grounds for denying membership to Croatia, whose human rights transgressions pale in comparison. Croatia's formal entry is due to be finalised by European officials meeting in Strasbourg next week, but the Netherlands is arguing for a postponement because of the fragile state of the Balkan peace settlement.

The Panorama closure comes less than a month after another independent newspaper, Novi List, was fined more than $1.5 million for allegedly evading customs duty on printing equipment. Its editors deny any wrongdoing.

The Tudjman government has also had a poor record on the treatment of minorities, in particular Serbs. Hundreds of Serb civilians were killed after the government stormed the separatist region of Krajina last year. Human rights officials say about 20,000 Croatian Serbs, who fled during the offensive, have applied to resettle in their former homes, but only a handful have been allowed to return.

There is little doubt that President Tudjman is personally involved in the campaign against dissent. He intervened repeatedly to veto opposition candidates for the post of Zagreb's mayor, saying opposition leadership in the capital would weaken Croatia. Political observers point out that once the liberal opposition controlled Zagreb city hall, it would be in a position to expose long-suspected corruption in the privatisation process.

Mr Tudjman appears to be drifting towards the far right as next year's presidential elections approach. And with the president showing no intention of bowing out, a new, more democratic Croatia may take a long time to emerge.

● The Bosnian government has arrested two Muslims indicted by the UN war crimes tribunal for killing Serbs at a prison camp in 1992, the tribunal said last week.

Pirate CFCs stall ozone recovery

Robin McKie

RUSSIAN criminals have created a black market trade in ozone-destroying chemicals to illegally replenish the air conditioning systems of gas-guzzling American cars.

More than 15,000 tons of these illegally manufactured chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) are brought into the US annually and distributed through hundreds of garages. The banned chemicals are the second most lucrative commodity smuggled through Miami, with supplies worth more than $300 million sold each year nationwide.

The scale of the black market in CFCs — which are used in old cooling plants, refrigerators and air conditioning units — threatens to wreck the international agreement aimed at halting the depletion of Earth's ozone layer, warns a report to be published this week by the Royal Institute of International Affairs.

The problem was last week described as "worrying" by Dr Joe Farman, who first discovered that CFCs — which interact with chemicals in the upper atmosphere — have punched holes in the ozone layer over the North and South Poles, allowing harmful ultra-violet radiation to reach the ground.

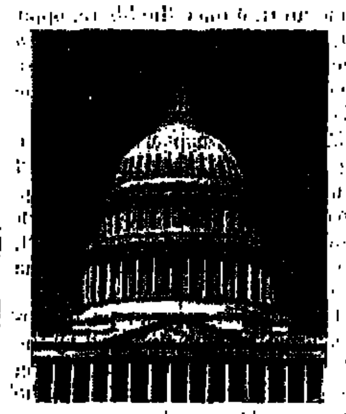
The institute report says CFC smuggling has flourished because criminals have been able to exploit the US's predilection for cars with powerful air conditioning systems. Ninety per cent of US cars have such units, compared with 10 per cent of European models.

In the US, new cars are fitted with cooling systems that use a range of refrigerants not linked with ozone layer damage. Old models, which used CFCs that are now banned in the US, have to be retro-fitted. This is an expensive procedure, however, and refitting costs can range from $300 to $800 a car.

The problem is worrying because although the ozone layer is expected to continue being depleted until 2000, after that it should slowly recover as cuts in CFC production take effect. But the recovery is threatened by the global black market trade in these chemicals. — The Observer

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Pumped up by memories of '70s



The US this week

Martin Walker

THE COUNTRY, and a very much smaller circle of influential people around President Clinton, were both rocked by echoes from the 1970s. One was odd, a little flurry at the petrol pump. The other was haunting, the death and funeral of a little-known American whose life since the seventies explains a great deal about the shaping of modern politics. In combination, the two events became a jarring collision between the ridiculous and the sublime.

Clinton went to a funeral, to join the conservative Republican Senator John McCain in giving the eulogies for David Ifshin, who died of lung cancer at the young age of 47 on the eve of May Day. Clinton's presence was to be expected, as an old friend and political ally, who had known Ifshin since they worked on the McGovern presidential campaign in 1972. McCain's presence at the funeral was less predictable, and helps to reveal one of the most dramatic political odysseys of modern American life.

It was in 1970, as a prisoner of war in Hanoi, that the Navy pilot John McCain first came across Ifshin, speaking on Hanoi radio about American war crimes against North Vietnam. Ifshin's broadcast was then used as an instrument of psychological torture against McCain and the other downed American pilots.

Ifshin had travelled to Hanoi as president of the National Student Association, having just graduated as an English major from Syracuse university, where he had been president of the student body at a time of widespread campus revolt and anti-war activism. Fifteen years later, Ifshin walked into McCain's Senate office to apologise, to state that he had been duped and mistaken, and that what he had done in Hanoi was "a wilful delusion — I am as appalled as anybody else by what I did".

The two men became firm friends, and jointly founded the Institute for Democracy in Vietnam, the body which campaigned successfully to restore diplomatic relations between the US and Hanoi.

Ifshin's conversion from the politics of the anti-war left came when he fled the US in despair at the re-election of President Richard Nixon, and went to work and live on a kibbutz in Israel.

At the time of the Yom Kippur war of October 1973, as Israel fought for its life against simultaneous attacks from Egypt and Syria, Ifshin found himself unloading ammun[illegible] US Air[illegible] he later recalled, almost an epiphany, the realisation that American warplanes and weaponry were a force for good, for a cause that he believed in.

He returned to the US, went to law school, and became one of the country's leading experts on electoral law, developing a mastery over the various arcane regulations for getting on the ballot in all the states, which became essential electoral tools in both the Mondale and later the Clinton campaigns.

By 1992, Ifshin had become one of the most important figures connecting American Jewish organisations to the Democratic party. Since 1985 he had been general counsel and a director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, by far the most influential arm of the pro-Israel lobby. He was also on the board of the Coalition for a Democratic Majority, a movement which sought to steer the party back to the electable centre of politics.

Some on the left of the party had never quite forgiven Ifshin for his renunciation of the anti-war movement. The issue remains deeply divisive for many of the Vietnam movement veterans who have risen to prominence within the Clinton administration.

Prime among them was Harold Ickes, who is now deputy chief of staff at the White House, and who in 1992 was running the Clinton campaign in the New York primary election, a crucial hurdle on the way to securing the Democratic nomination. Clinton was a battered candidate, bruised by scandal, and the complex ethnic stew of New York was proving resistant to his political appeal.

Ickes, a prominent lawyer (and also the son of President Roosevelt's Secretary of the Interior), was in despair, when Ifshin came to the rescue. In effect, Ifshin delivered the power of the Jewish lobby to Clinton. He called on all the leading fund-raisers, all the main rabbis, organised lobbying teams to every synagogue, cashed in favour after favour he was owed from his AIPAC days.

Clinton's New York campaign verged on parody. He wore a *yarmulka*, promised to open a *glatt kosher* kitchen in the White House, called on a rigidly Orthodox synagogue in Brooklyn where the women were segregated behind a screen, and declared, "This is a wonderful occasion for me, just like every Saturday night at an Arkansas barbecue". Ifshin, who later joked that this had been "the most successful Jewish offensive since the Yom Kippur war", delivered the victory, but was then eclipsed and then passed over for the ambassadorship to Israel, or any other prominent post that he might have deserved.

But Ifshin's surprising absence from the senior ranks of the Clinton administration was in a tragic way to be repaired before his death. Last November, at the time of Thanksgiving, Ifshin was told he had lung cancer. He and his wife Gail had three young children, and were nervous for their future. The friends rallied round. A large trust fund was collected, and in the first week of April, the entire Ifshin family was invited to stay at the White House, in the Lincoln bedroom, and Clinton [illegible]

Ifshin was buried amid those other echoes from the past, the old times of 1973 and 1979. Not that there were any lines of angry drivers waiting outside America's gas stations, nor any Arabs sheikhs being burned in effigy. But the Republicans did their best to whip up some good old-fashioned outrage at the soaring cost of oil.

There was a modest rise in the petrol price, from an average of $1.12 for a gallon of unleaded and self-served regular on February 9, to an average $1.28 on April 28. Although in some markets such as California prices rose more sharply, gasoline in the US is still extremely cheap.

There is no political decision behind this latest modest increase in the price of gasoline. There has been no Opec resolution, and no new revolution in the Middle East. There have, instead, been a series of market forces at work. The price of West Texas intermediate crude oil was $16 a barrel in January, and $23 a barrel by April 18.

THERE are three immediate reasons for this. America had a hard winter, and refineries produced more heating oil later into the season than usual, so retaining less refining capacity for car fuel. Then there was an accident last month which temporarily cut production at one of the biggest refineries in California. Finally, Saddam Hussein is bickering with the United Nations over the terms on which he will be allowed to sell a fixed amount of oil on the world market.

The oil market is trying to calculate the impact of at least a billion dollars worth of Iraqi oil being put on sale. So while waiting for Saddam to make the price drop, nobody in the oil business wants to buy oil at the current high price. Stocks have been cut back to a minimum with the result that there has been a series of shortages, worse in markets like California than in others. [illegible]

When a motorist pays $3.50 a gallon as the British do at the petrol pump, or $4 a gallon like the French and Germans, or almost $5 like the Italians and Japanese, a little price hiccup of another 10 or 20 cents is hardly noticed. But Americans are spoilt, paying less than half the British price, and conventional political wisdom says they get very aggrieved about paying more.

This may be wrong. Ross Perot was not howled down when he recommended a 50-cent-a-gallon tax increase to the electorate of 1992. Incidentally, every extra cent on the gas tax raises roughly $1,000 million for the US Treasury. If the US motorist paid British gas prices, there would be no federal budget deficit this year. There would, instead, be a surplus of about $10 billion, and Detroit might start to lead the world in producing lean, fuel-efficient engines.

Still, the White House knew that a political fuss was coming, and prepared for it by announcing the sale of 12 million barrels from the strategic oil reserve. This was never going to flood the market with gasoline. In fact, the Saudis usually pump that amount in 36 hours. But it was enough to reassure an overheating spot market that relief was only a presidential gesture away, even while the Republicans demanded a repeal of "the Clinton gas tax" of 4.3 cents a gallon, imposed in the 1993 budget.

But all this is really practice for the medium- to long-term price rise that is beginning to look inevitable. There is a new market force on the block that could take oil prices back up to $30 a barrel and more within the next five years.

The most important economic statistic of the decade was that, in 1994, China ceased to be a net exporter of food and energy and became a net importer. And when 1.3 billion people start simultaneously clambering up the food and energy chains, interesting things start happening to prices.

[illegible] 1994, China consumed about five barrels of oil per head (compared with 32 barrels a head in Germany, and 53 barrels a head in the US). The lowest estimates for China's growth now suggest consumption is doubling to 10 barrels a head in 2000. That would mean China importing an extra 6 billion barrels a year, or 16 million barrels a day — twice the current production of Saudi Arabia.

China, moreover, is not the only market where demand is surging. India's more modest growth rates have shrouded the implication that the world's second most populous nation is following the consuming patterns of the first. If China can be expected to match the oil consumption of the US by 2005, India can be expected to match the consumption of western Europe.

DOUBTLESS the market will adjust to take care of the shortages, and increase the oil exploration rate. But the world does seem to be heading for the most dramatic period of commodity price inflation since the 1970s. Oil, after all, is only the half of it. China is also importing much more food, as more than a billion people make a new long march from a subsistence diet of rice to sweet and sour pork and Big Mac hamburgers.

The prospect is not of a gloomy repetition of that overdone seventies nightmare of gross shortages and mass famines, but of steady increases in the prices of food and energy. Whereas the issue in 1973 could be encapsulated in the appeal of a charity poster that depicted a starving Ethiopian child, it can now be symbolised by a more glossy advertising photograph of a mobile telephone wielded by a Chinese yuppie as he drives his gas-guzzler down some future motorway to Shanghai.

It is not the threat of poverty that confronts us, but the sudden and startling challenge of prosperity for billions of people, all taking place in less time than it took David Ifshin to get to the White House from his moment of epiphany during the Yom Kippur war which provoked the first Opec price rise [illegible]

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Swiss banks open up to Jewish groups

Ian Katz in New York

SWISS bankers have agreed to open their jealously guarded curtain of secrecy to allow Jewish groups to hunt for millions of dollars believed to have been deposited before and during the second world war by Holocaust victims.

Under an agreement signed last week in New York, a team of independent auditors will be given "unfettered access to all relevant files" held by the Swiss financial institutions, where many European Jews opened accounts to protect their assets from the Nazis.

Elan Steinberg, executive director of the World Jewish Congress, said the agreement would be "a milestone if the letter and spirit are carried out". Representatives of the Congress, the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem, and the Swiss Bankers' Association flew to New York to sign the two-page document.

Jewish organisations and relatives of those killed by the Nazis have been fighting for years to be allowed to search the records of Swiss banks for accounts which have lain dormant since the war.

They claim that Swiss banks have grossly underestimated the sums deposited by Holocaust victims. In September, the Swiss Bankers' Association said a survey of its members had identified $34.1 million, in some 775 accounts, which appeared to belong to Jews later killed by the Nazis.

Jewish organisations claim that the true figure may be as high as $7 billion, pointing out that the Swiss Bankers' Association figures do not include accounts opened by Swiss nationals who may have been acting for Jews from other European countries.

Pressure on the Swiss authorities for a more open investigation of wartime accounts has come from President Clinton and the Senate banking committee, which held hearings on the issue late last month.

Under last week's agreement, a team of six members — three appointed by Jewish groups and three by the banks — will supervise the auditors' hunt for dormant accounts.

The deal is a step towards resolving a long dispute between international Jewry and the Swiss banks. Many heirs of Holocaust victims believe the banks have tried to hide behind their secrecy laws to avoid restoring the money to its rightful owners.

Ironically, Switzerland framed its famous financial secrecy laws in the 1930s precisely to attract fearful customers like the European Jews.

The auditors face a huge task. They plan to examine the records for all accounts opened in Swiss banks between the early 1930s and the mid-1940s which have shown no activity since then.

Recently released documents have identified 182 accounts opened by Romanian Jews in one Swiss bank alone. Totalling around $2 million when the deposits were made, the sum is estimated to have swollen to $20 million with interest.

Where heirs cannot be found to claim the money, the funds will go to charities.

Dramatic fall from grace for French 'saint'

Paul Webster in Paris

ABBE PIERRE, who only a month ago was seen as a living saint, has plunged from being France's most popular figure to its national pariah, accused of casting doubt on Nazi crimes against Jews.

The Franciscan priest, aged 83, who smuggled Jews out of France during the second world war and influenced both Socialist and Gaullist governments, has been rejected by the Catholic Church, the Jewish community, human rights' organisations and his closest friends.

For more than 50 years, Abbé Pierre, whose real name is Henri Grouès, fought a lonely battle for the poor and homeless through his world-wide Emmaus organisation.

His campaigns became enmeshed with those of three other human rights evangelists: Bernard Kouchner, the former humanitarian affairs minister; Jacques Gaillot, the former Bishop of Evreux; and Leon Schwartzenberg, a crusading cancer expert.

All three have turned on him publicly since he criticised the prosecution of philosopher Roger Garaudy, aged 83, whose book, The Founding Myths Of Israeli Politics, questions the extent of the Holocaust.

Abbé Pierre defended himself in Libération, after saying Mr Garaudy had the right to express his views. He denied accusations of anti-Semitism and called for debate on the accuracy of Holocaust research.

His defence had the effect of changing embarrassed reaction into a fury of condemnation, intensified by a unanimous media assault.

The League Against Racism and Anti-Semitism told the priest to resign from its committee. Jean Kahn, the president of the Jewish consistory, echoed the chief rabbi, Joseph Sitruk, by calling the priest's attitude "dramatic, disappointing and unacceptable".

The Gaullist justice minister, Jacques Toubon, expressed official disapproval, while the Archbishop of Paris, Jean-Marie Lustiger, led Catholic bishops in deploring Abbé Pierre's "scandalous" support for Mr Garaudy.

With his moral authority in tatters, the priest is in retreat in a Norman monastery. Last week, he told the grand rabbi he condemned the trivialisation and denial of the Holocaust, but that Mr Garaudy's book remained on his desk.

The Week in Britain James Lewis

Howard and the judiciary continue to cross swords

THE Home Secretary, Michael Howard, suffered yet another defeat at the hands of the judiciary when the High Court ruled that he had acted unlawfully in fixing a 15-year minimum sentence on two boys who killed a two-year-old toddler, James Bulger.

In a crime which caused public revulsion, Robert Thompson and Jon Venables, both then aged 10, abducted their victim from a Merseyside shopping centre and murdered him on a railway line. The trial judge ordered that they be "detained at Her Majesty's pleasure", recommending that they should serve at least eight years in prison. The Lord Chief Justice increased that to 10 years and Mr Howard, responding to various public petitions — one drummed up by a tabloid newspaper — upped it again to 15 years.

Ruling against Mr Howard in the High Court, Lord Justice Pill said it was wrong to treat young offenders as though they were adults. Mr Howard reacted with fury, and said he would appeal against the decision, which "flew in the face of judicial practice and precedent". He would even legislate, if necessary, to "preserve the supremacy of Parliament". The likelihood is, however, that either course of action would eventually be overturned by the European Court of Human Rights.

Underlying the Bulger case is a long-running battle between Mr Howard and the judiciary over the Home Secretary's repeated interference in sentencing and parole decisions. Last week's ruling followed a trend set by a series of court decisions which have diluted the role of the Home Secretary and the executive in deciding how long people convicted of murder and serious crimes should stay in prison.

A GIRL of 13, who went to the aid of a friend embroiled in a fight with other teenagers, was repeatedly kicked about the head in the incident near a funfair and later died in hospital. Two teenage girls, aged 12 and 13, respectively, have been charged with the manslaughter of the girl, Louise Allen, of Corby, Northamptonshire.

Louise's death focused attention on violent bullying among girls, which is said by the charity, Kidscape, to have risen by 50 per cent since 1992.

Delwyn Tattum, head of a unit at Cardiff which studies bullying, said that girls had turned to aggression. "Girls are forming their own gangs and carrying knives more," he said. "If we present women as being more aggressive and thrusting, then we must not be surprised if some girls misinterpret the role of females in society today and become aggressive and violent."

THE Channel Tunnel operator, Eurotunnel, may be in severe financial difficulties — its pre-tax loss for 1995 of £925 million was one of the worst results in corporate history — but its Le Shuttle operations are a cause of mounting concern to the rival ferry companies.

P&O reported last week that passenger numbers on its Dover-Calais route had fallen by nearly a fifth over the year (from 1.9 million to less than 1.6 million) and that the number of cars using the service had fallen by nearly a quarter to 292,780. Stena Sealink, the Swedish-owned ferry operator, which has also seen its market share dented by Eurotunnel's Le Shuttle service, last week announced price cuts on its duty-free goods,

Mergers between ferry companies seem inevitable, but P&O and Stena both deny they have any plans to merge. Three years ago P&O yielded to government demands and gave undertakings that it would not merge with rivals. It now wants to withdraw the undertakings, which were instigated to preserve competition and help Eurotunnel to establish itself.

CHANNEL 4 at the last minute withdrew a TV programme, Psychoanalysing Diana, due to have been shown this week. The commercial television station said the programme would not be broadcast in any shape or form.

Several newspapers had savaged the programme after seeing preview tapes of a Freudian case study in which psychoanalyst Dylan Evans probed a Princess Diana look-alike, using the princess's published words.

The questions were said to deal with the princess's childhood and youth problems, her alienation from Prince Charles, her love-hate relationship with the media, her bulimia and her desire to be the "Queen of Hearts".

Channel 4's director of programmes, John Willis, explained: "This was a very innovative concept. In the end, [controller] Michael Grade and I decided that the idea did not work."

DRUG USE in Britain is "substantially higher" among young whites than among blacks of the same age, according to a Home Office report. It concludes that an upsurge in drug-taking among whites in their late teens and 20s means that the image of Afro-Caribbeans as having the highest drug use is "passing into history".

A survey conducted in 1994 found that 43 per cent of whites aged 16-29 said they have taken illegal drugs, compared with 34 per cent of Afro-Caribbeans of the same age.

Austin

THE MICHAEL HOWARD TOP SECURITY CRÈCHE

Zulu boy must leave 'white mum'

David Beresford in Johannesburg, and Alex Bellos

A TRAUMATIC, trans-global tug-of-war between a Zulu father and an English widow came to an end on Sunday when an ecstatic Charles Mahlangu welcomed his 10-year-old son back to South Africa from Britain.

But the boy was still clearly traumatised by his departure from Britain, which was delayed on Friday last week when he was taken off a British Airways flight, crying for his would-be adoptive mother: "I don't want to leave mummy."

Sifiso Mahlangu finally left Heathrow the following day, watched by a weeping Salome Stopford, aged 50, who had unsuccessfully attempted to adopt him after bringing him to Britain in 1992, ostensibly to further his education.

It emerged that Sifiso had written a note to the Queen, saying: "Dear Her Majesty, I want to stay here with my white mum. Can you please help me because no one else will help me. Everyone seems to be against me and my Mum. I want to stay here with my family. I am happy here."

Sifiso arrived in South Africa on Sunday with his mother, Selina Mahlangu, aged 30, who used to work as Mrs Stopford's maid there.

The "rights" to the Mahlangu family's story have been secured by a South African magazine, Fair Lady, which has helped them with their custody battle in Britain.

The editor of Fair Lady, Roz Wrottesley, said that the magazine's financial support had been limited to a contribution to the costs of flying the Mahlangu parents to Britain for the initial court hearing last year.

She strongly defended the Mahlangu corner in the custody case, dismissing arguments that the boy would have had a better life in Britain as racist and materialist. "They have never, at any time, contemplated adoption. Their desire to have their son back has been absolutely unflagging."





Salome Stopford with one of her daughters (above), and Sifiso (right) back in South Africa

Even if South Africa offers more opportunities than it did before, Sifiso's home life will not be as comfortable as it has been in London.

He visited his parents last year and said: "They live in one room, and I had to sleep in the same bed as my mother and sister, while my father slept on the floor. I had to bathe in a bucket and use an outside toilet."

The case is to be reconsidered by the European courts next week, but Mrs Stopford said she was uncertain what would happen if they ruled against the British courts' decision now Sifiso was in South Africa.

Alarm at 'privatisation by stealth' for woodlands

Peter Hetherington

THE Forestry Commission, Britain's biggest landowner, is facing "privatisation by stealth" to meet tough new financial targets, countryside groups said last week.

After selling a tenth of its land holding — 310,000 acres — since the early 1980s, the state undertaking is under growing pressure to sell off its most important forests to eventually become profitable. So far, it has raised £208 million for the Treasury from forest sales.

The commission's commercial arm, Forest Enterprise, which owns and manages much of the country's woodland, has been told to adopt rigorous market disciplines under agency status granted last month. Amenity groups fear that walkers could be banned from huge tracts of land. The commission's "freedom to roam" policy is regarded as a model for other landowners.

Guidelines prepared by the commission, telling staff how to judge demand for access before estates are put on the market, have set alarm bells ringing.

While the commission says it will not sell "sensitive" areas, such as the New Forest, opponents of privatisation believe that the "access check list" leaked to the Ramblers' Association has been designed to tilt the balance in favour of accelerated sales.

The commission says that while it does not wish to sell land "intensively used for recreation", some woods of "recreational importance" might still be hived off if that helped to rationalise estates — although most sales would take place only where access could be guaranteed.

Gavin Strang, the shadow agriculture minister, said: "Almost inevitably when an estate is sold, access is restricted or denied."

● The Government is to receive a £2 billion windfall — equivalent to a 1p cut in income tax — from taking over responsibility for British Coal's pension fund.

The fund is heading for a £4 billion surplus which will be split equally between enhanced pensions for miners and white-collar staff, and the Treasury, said the National Audit Office in a report published last week on British Coal's privatisation.

Haven found for refugee

AN ALL-NIGHT telephone and fax marathon by the Labour MP, Bernie Grant, succeeded in persuading Guyana to give refuge to the Nigerian student Ade Onibiyo, who was due to be deported to Nigeria, *writes David Pallister*:

Mr Onibiyo, aged 20, flew to Guyana in South America, where Mr Grant was born, after the MP for Tottenham contacted the president, Cheddi Jagan.

The frantic efforts to find Mr Onibiyo a haven have coincided with doubts about government claims that Interpol in Nigeria had found his father, Adbul, a pro-democracy dissident, who had apparently disappeared after he was deported last October.

Last month, the Court of Appeal upheld a High Court ruling that the Home Secretary, Michael Howard, had not acted unlawfully in ordering the son's deportation.

Mr Onibiyo has a brother and sister who are British nationals. His mother and two younger sisters are in London but they, too, face the threat of removal.

Scargill makes his pitch

Michael White and Seumas Milne

ARTHUR Scargill has opened a new phase in the guerrilla war which small parties are threatening to wage against the Labour-Conservative hegemony at the coming general election.

When the miners' leader's Socialist Labour Party (SLP) was finally given its formal May Day launch last week, he hinted that he would stand against Alan Howarth at the next election if Labour imposes the Tory defector from Stratford-on-Avon on a constituency such as the Yorkshire seat of Wentworth.

Given the unpopularity of the Tories under John Major and unease on the left about Tony Blair's leadership, the surprise is that David v. Goliath politics has taken so long to re-emerge after Margaret Thatcher's charismatic grip on British politics was replaced by pragmatic muddle.

The prolonged political crisis of the 1970s led to the rise of Scots and Welsh nationalist parties, a surge of Trotskyite activism in and beyond Labour's ranks, and — briefly in the 1974 elections — a boost for the fascist National Front.

Little was heard from Tory MPs such as Douglas Hurd and Chris Patten about the need for electoral reform and proportional representation once Mrs Thatcher was firmly in charge. And the greatest breakaway of all, the ex-Labour SDP, ended in merger with the Liberals.

But in the 1990s electoral reform talk has returned on both left and right, with disaffected MPs and activists predicting splits and realignment in both major parties after the next election.

Mr Scargill has long been a supporter of PR as a vital element and is anti-European, like Sir James Goldsmith, from whom he does not expect financial support.

Just as the Goldsmith-funded Referendum Party is sizing up prominent Tory MPs such as Kenneth Clarke and David Mellor to take on, members of Mr Scargill's SLP have already decided to challenge Tony Blair in his Sedgefield constituency and the shadow employment secretary, Michael Meacher, in Oldham West.

Meanwhile, Harrods owner Mohamed al-Fayed may emulate another philanthropic tradition in the grocery trade, that of the Sainsbury family, whose good causes have long included discreet help for political think tanks.

Mr al-Fayed is looking for bright young people, "without axes to grind", to run an independent institute to examine options for constitutional reform. He will provide the "seed corn".

Options range from a slimmed-down monarchy and reformed House of Lords to a Bill of Rights and Freedom of Information Act.

Mr Scargill is also an outsider with a grievance. The SLP was being founded, the National Union of Mineworkers president said, because there were now "no fundamental differences between the Conservative party, New Labour and the Liberal Democrats".

The new party, whose candidate, Brenda Nixon, won 5.4 per cent of the vote in the Hemsworth by-election in February, has been dismissed by both the Labour leadership and leftwing MPs like Ken Livingstone as irrelevant.

Mr Scargill was flanked at the launch by two London Labour councillors who have defected to Socialist Labour, Pat Sikorski of the Rail Maritime and Transport union executive, and Imran Khan, solicitor for the family of the racist murder victim, Stephen Lawrence.

Insurance giant to shed 5,000 jobs

Ian King

MORE than 5,000 jobs are to be axed as two of the best known names in the insurance business merge to create a £6.3 billion giant.

Sun Alliance and Royal Insurance stunned the City last week when they revealed plans to join to create Britain's biggest insurance group, in an attempt to fend off fierce competition from telephone-based newcomers such as Direct Line.

The deal, which will see about 4,000 jobs cut from the Royal's head offices in London and Liverpool, and from Sun Alliance's regional head offices, with another 1,000 coming from foreign operations, was criticised by unions, which warned that thousands more jobs were at risk. Alan Piper, assistant general secretary of the banking and finance union Bifu, said that thousands of staff at both companies now faced months of uncertainty.

Roger Lyons, general secretary of the MSF, said: "There has been no prior consultation. The 22,000 employees first heard of these draconian job losses over breakfast."

Michael Meacher, shadow employment secretary, called for inquiries by both the Office for Fair Trading and the European Commission into the proposed merger.

However, news of the merger, which will save about £175 million by 1998, was welcomed by the City, where shares in both companies soared. Royal shares closed up 67p at 437p, valuing the group at £2.9 billion, while Sun Alliance shares jumped 55p to 414p, valuing it at £3.4 billion,

Announcing details of the merger, Royal's chief executive, Richard Gamble, who becomes group chief executive of the merged business, stressed that most of the 5,000 jobs would go through natural wastage. "Most of the reduction will come from early retirement and a recruitment freeze, but there will be some voluntary redundancies."

● British Telecom's dreams of creating one of the world's biggest telephone companies collapsed last week with the failure of £33 billion merger talks with its erstwhile rival, Cable & Wireless.

Five months of tough negotiations ended after a marathon meeting of the C&W board agreed that the hurdles to a merger were too high.

Tories freefall into a vortex of decline

The Conservatives are in a state of decomposition, says **Hugo Young**, but despite the local elections result John Major remains the best asset they have



MICHAEL Heseltine is busking it on BBC TV's Newsnight. The local election results are appalling. Heseltine is calm, straight-eyed. He seems to relish the palpable absurdities he will now be called upon to utter. That is his job, and he knows that nobody in the Government does it as well as he does.

The results, Heseltine coolly says, are irrelevant. They tell one nothing about what is to come. But they also, in so far as they are not irrelevant, tell one that the Government's steady recovery, which has apparently been going on for 18 months, is on course. Although the measure of this recovery is a rise from 26 to 28 per cent in popular support for the Conservatives, the deputy prime minister offers his analysis without a trace of embarrassment. Not for a nano-second is his earnestness broken by the eye-flicker of a possibility that he might sound ridiculous.

What we're witnessing here is a Cabinet in denial. Ministers say these things not because they believe them, but because, as politicians, they can't contemplate the possibility of disbelief. They've forgotten what it is not to be a politician. They can do no other. The media are their accomplices. Interviewers accommodate their mindset, even as they challenge it. Everyone helps them search for little glimpses of hope, if only to deconstruct them.

We should understand there are some crises for which there is no remedy, and this is one of them. The Conservative party is in a state of decomposition and cannot, in fact, reverse that process. They are, if they would but recognise it, captives to fate. I hesitate to call John Major a tragic figure, but he has the defining element of tragedy about him: the forces that direct his future are ineluctable.

Consider, to begin with, the remedies suggested by those who think otherwise. There are Tories less seduced by professional optimism than Mr Heseltine, but what do they say? Give us strong leadership, bray one lot of backbenchers. Get a grip, tell us where we're going. But at the same time, and confusingly, listen to the people and find out what they want. Or else, mutter another lot, let the Eurosceptics stop bitching. The Daily Telegraph, gathering itself for a peroration, shouts for the party to do "what is bold and what is right", before recommending an agenda that would drive half-a-dozen ministers out of the Cabinet.

This is the best they can do, and bears witness to the Tory predicament. Hot air vies with self-contradiction to disguise a truth which, naturally, they cannot bear to face. Each element in the drama embodies a problem without an answer.

At the apex is John Major. Leader-ditching is the classic remedy for a party in terminal trouble, but he offered them the chance for that last year and they decided not to take it. Since then, party rules have been re-written to foreclose another challenge before the election, but this obstacle matters less than the political reality, which is that it's in Major's hands alone whether he wishes to depart, and nothing is likely to induce him to do so.

He is prone to black moods, I'm told. He still cares what people say about him. "He's not David Mellor or Alan Clark, a cad or a bounder, who don't give a damn what the papers say," one of his closest allies told me. Backbenchers gauge his temper, and purport at present to hear that he's depressed.

The outward signs say otherwise. Unlike this time last year, every senior colleague wants him to stay in the job. He has solid support at the top. For a Cabinet that's presiding over the worst election prospect in living memory, this one is unusually united. There is solidarity in gloom. It's as if these ministers have been through the fire and out the other side, and will allow no further anxieties to destabilise them. That is certainly the case with their leader. Whether he's privately depressed or not, his public resilience is a wonder to behold. His standard demeanour gives off a comfortable little smirk, which says I know something you don't know. Whatever that something is, it comes from the deepest well of a politician's self-belief.

The fact is that Major has grounds for such self-belief. He remains the best asset the Conservatives have got. MORI's April poll showed 15 per cent of respondents satisfied with the Government, 29 per cent with Major. This may be small comfort. Compared with the party, rather than the Government, Major is level-pegging. But many MPs, in the practical world where they have to win votes, regard him as a name to conjure with. The worse the Conservative party behaves, the more decently is Major regarded. A rise in his personal rating, as the only unifying leader for this vicious rabble, can be relied on.

However, that is a problem not an answer. Mr Major is indeed the only unifier. But look at what unity he has achieved. It is unimaginable, this side of an election, that any other leader would be seen as a preferable alternative by more than a fraction of backbenchers. They have to say, without irony, that he's the best prime minister they've got. But they then tear him, and with him their own prospects, to pieces.

For the party, too, is gripped by inner forces. It is the second character in this undeflectable event. For the first three months of the year, a certain discipline came over it. Differences were not buried, but they were silenced. The semblance of a fighting force appeared to be regrouping. Since the need to talk, still less vote, on anything to do with Europe was temporarily receding, it seemed possible that incendiary voices might continue to see the merits of discretion.

This was to misjudge the effects of the prospect of defeat. Nothing corrupts a party like the imminent withdrawal of power. Power, we have to re-learn, is the cement that binds together what otherwise tend always to be centrifugal: the ambitions and rivalries of party politicians with doctrinal positions they will not surrender. After the winter lull, it has become apparent to more of them that the Tory party is in a vortex of decline which they feel free to accelerate. As its prospects vanish, the Europhobes show less compunction about expressing their disdain for each failure by the ministeriat to comply with their ever more arrogant demands.

To account for John Major's unearthly calm in the face of adversity, his friends explain that he has already bowed to fate

In this vortex, another claim gets washed swiftly down the plughole. All governments are more or less incompetent, and nobody can be sure that any other government at any other time would have handled the huge conflicting pressures of the BSE calamity more successfully than this one. But competence is something the people have ceased to expect. How Major and his colleagues can hope in the space of 12 months to rectify this pervasive disbelief is unknown to anyone.

The tragic scenario, however, is not yet complete. It lacks the Sophoclean element of self-destruction. But that isn't far away either, among the raucous noises-off. As the chorus to Major's fate, his friends in the media are duly betraying him — and helping produce the opposite world from the one they keep asking him to fight for. Desiring an independent Britain, the apotheosis of the Europhobia on which they rig their comment and manipulate their news every week, the Black and Murdoch and Rothermere papers show no sign of desisting from conduct calculated to ensure the election of the party least likely to provide it.

Thus is fate now beginning finally to be sealed. It is beyond the reach of facts and events, policies and promises, tax cuts and real disposable income. The destinies of the players are engulfed beneath the least rebuttable of all perceptions: their own presence on the stage. The jury seems to have decided. Because they exist, and have done for 17 years, they must now depart. This is the verdict hardly any politician can accept. But that doesn't oblige outsiders to do the same.

One man may be a hold-out against the collective fantasies of his deputy and his party chairman. If you ask John Major's friends to account for his unearthly calm in the face of adversity, their explanation is that he has already bowed to fate.

He will fight a hard election. He detests socialism, and isn't one of those who believe the Blair Labour party has abandoned it. He still thinks he might be able to pull off what he did in 1992. His heart fills with unstoical resignation at the prospect of losing power at the very moment when he should be regaining it. What he says about the economy's comparative strength is mostly true, and would normally be enough for victory.

If he wins, he will be a great hero. But if he loses, he is ready for it. He sees his record, above all, as honourable. He did the right thing, often to good effect. He rode a party that had become intolerable, doing everything he could to keep it in the real world. According to his friends, in defeat he will have one indestructible consolation. "He knows his stock will rise every month for the next 10 years, as the Conservative party gets into a bigger and bigger mess."

Bill may give MPs new right to sue

Patrick Wintour

SENIOR judges and Tory peers, with the help of the Government, have introduced a bill to give MPs and peers a right to sue newspapers over reports of their parliamentary activities in the wake of a court ruling preventing Neil Hamilton, Tory MP for Tatton, from suing the Guardian.

The new measures, in the Defamation Bill, will, said the Lord Chancellor, Lord Mackay, give Mr Hamilton the opportunity to restart his action. Mr Hamilton felt forced to resign from the Government after publication of the story.

The previously unnoticed measures have been tabled in the Defamation Bill by Lord Finsberg, a Tory peer, and Lord Hoffmann, a Lord of the Appeal in Ordinary. Although the Government is claiming a neutral stance, the Leader of the Lords, Viscount Cranbourne, has won special dispensation from peers for the amendment to be debated at the bill's third reading.

Mr Hamilton's attempt to sue the Guardian was stayed by the courts after the newspaper successfully pleaded the privileges conferred on MPs by the Bill of Rights 1689 meant that a court could not inquire, even at the request of an MP, into anything he had said or done in Parliament. The Guardian argued this rendered it impossible to mount a full defence of justification since it could not cross-examine Mr Hamilton.

Lord Hoffmann's new clause would give an individual MP the right to waive that privilege if he wished the court to inquire into anything he had done in the course of his parliamentary duties.

If the amendment is passed, it will allow MPs to sue newspapers over reports of what they have done in relation to their parliamentary activities, but absolute privilege will still protect MPs from being sued over what they have said or done in Parliament.

David Pallister writes: Rupert Allason, the Tory MP for Torbay, last week lost his High Court action for malicious falsehood against the Daily Mirror, but the judge found that the newspaper had published an inaccurate story about him that was prompted by malice.

Mr Allason's claim fell because he was unable to prove that he had suffered financial loss. The MP faces costs of up to £250,000.

He had sued Mirror Group Newspapers, Alastair Campbell, the paper's former political editor and now Tony Blair's press secretary, and another former Mirror journalist, Andy McSmith.

The story that prompted Mr Allason's complaint was an 11-line item which said that 50 MPs had challenged Mr Allason to give the £250,000 damages he had just received from the Mirror in a libel action to Mirror pensioners.

The article was based on a Commons early day motion which had been conceived by a Mirror journalist, David Bradshaw. At first it was signed by only seven MPs and the story was therefore inaccurate.

But the judge said Mr Bradshaw was malicious in drafting the motion, getting a Labour MP to table it, and seeking to publish the story in haste. Mirror Group Newspapers were equally motivated by malice.

Warning of 'meltdown' as NHS trusts fight squeeze

David Brindle

LEADERS of NHS trusts have warned Stephen Dorrell, the Health Secretary, that the health service is facing the deepest crisis since the Government introduced the internal market.

One trust chief executive has said financial pressures are so severe that there is a prospect of "meltdown" in parts of the service.

The problems come after a winter of bed shortages in many areas, recalling the annual crises which the introduction of contracts between health authority purchasers and hospital and community trust providers was supposed to end.

Trouble next winter in the run-up to a spring general election is foreshadowed by what has been, by common consent, the most difficult contracting round between trusts and authorities since the market started in 1991.

The Government has given authorities in England £23.2 billion for hospital and community services in 1996/97, a real increase in funding of 1.1 per cent. But it has again ordered "efficiency savings" of 3 per cent.

To meet spiralling demand for health care, while keeping waiting times no longer than 12 months, many authorities have asked trusts to deliver more care for little or no increase in their contract price.

Disputes have broken out across the country and many contracts remain unsigned six weeks into the financial year. In east London, non-emergency hospital appointments have been frozen because of a stand-off between the Newham Healthcare trust and its local health authority.

In Scotland, the Raigmore hospital trust in Inverness told the Highland health board to state publicly which services it was expected to cut to meet a standstill budget.

According to the NHS Trust Federation, which met Mr Dorrell last week, problems are "worse than ever before".

Richard James, chief executive of the Gloucestershire-based Severn trust, is quoted in the federation's newsletter as having described the position as "extremely grave". He warned of "meltdown in a number of areas in the health service in the not-too-distant future".

Mr James is said to have told the federation's ruling council: "We are hearing about huge differences between purchasers and providers, amounting to millions of pounds. These problems are real and serious. They are not shroud-waving."

Ross Tristem, the federation's director, said the deputation which had seen Mr Dorrell had left him in no doubt about the severity of the difficulties facing trusts.

Hopes fade of an end to European beef ban

Stephen Bates in Brussels

THE Government's hopes of securing at least a part lifting of the European Union ban on British beef receded on Monday as Douglas Hogg, the Agriculture Minister, lobbied his fellow ministers at an informal meeting in the Italian city of Otranto.

That meeting is not empowered to take decisions on lifting the ban. It comes less than a week after the formal agriculture council in Luxembourg, when Britain was warned that further measures would be needed.

Beef sales have slumped across Europe by an average of more than 30 per cent in the wake of the BSE scare, even in countries like Germany which were not importing British beef.

Agriculture ministers have warned that they want to see the effect of the British eradication measures before their ban is lifted, and some have suggested this may not be before the end of the year.

Veterinary experts from all 15 member states were due to meet in Brussels this week, but they will not be formally discussing the beef crisis or a lifting of the embargo on byproducts. To do so, they would require a recommendation from the European Commission, which said on Monday it was still not in a position to back lifting the ban.

Meanwhile, the Commission announced on Tuesday that it is making a grant of more than £1 million to China for genetic improvement of its water buffaloes.

The project, which will fund research into boosting the milk and meat yields of buffaloes in three provinces, was announced by Sir Leon Brittan, the trade commissioner, during a visit to China.

Teresa Gorman, the Eurosceptic Tory MP, described the grant as "ludicrous gesture politics".

Inland Revenue tax break for Tory MPs

David Hencke

THE Inland Revenue has granted a £400,000 tax amnesty to about 20 Conservative MPs, some of whom claimed car mileage and depreciation allowances for parliamentary business while using company cars.

At the heart of the issue are the parliamentary rules governing the generous 60p to 74p mileage rates for MPs. One Tory MP who claimed for three company cars at different addresses has saved more than £30,000 in tax, interest and penalties.

The revelation came on Tuesday, the day of publication for the first Register of MPs' Interests based on new rules following the Nolan committee report on sleaze.

Details of the tax amnesty came to light after a retired tax inspector, David Benny, who handled MPs' and directors' income tax, complained to Lord Nolan about the Inland Revenue's action.

In a letter placed in the Public Records Office by the Nolan committee, he says: "I was personally involved during 1993 and 1994 in the aftermath of approaches by a number of MPs to a government minister who intervened on their behalf with the Board of Inland Revenue. As a result the board absolved these MPs from liabilities to income tax, interest, and, very likely in some cases, penalties as well."

Treasury ministers are livid about Mr Benny's complaint but do not deny a meeting between Tory MPs and Stephen Dorrell, then financial secretary to the Treasury, on the general point of tax law affecting MPs' car allowances.

Michael Jack, Financial Secretary to the Treasury, said: "The ministers concerned and the Inland Revenue are clear that members did not receive more favourable tax treatment."

In Brief

JOHN MAJOR'S fragile one seat majority was under fresh pressure when it was disclosed that a Tory backbencher, Roy Thomason, has been given a one-month deadline to start repaying his £6 million debts or face bankruptcy proceedings.

A COMMONS select committee looking at gun control following the Dunblane tragedy, has been told by the British Medical Association that giving psychological examinations to people applying for gun licences would be pointless because no tests existed to predict murderous behaviour.

Comment, page 12

THE LORD Chief Justice, Lord Taylor, is to retire after being diagnosed as suffering from cancer. He will continue his administrative duties until a successor is appointed.

THE benefits of the £100 million Newbury bypass in Berkshire will be wiped out within a decade, according to a transport document due to be published next week by Berkshire county council.

FOUR people found out they are HIV positive after previously being told they were clear of the Aids virus on the basis of a faulty Abbott IMX test.

A COLLEGE administrator who was sacked for undergoing a sex change is to claim a six-figure sum in compensation from Cornwall county council after the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg ruled that her dismissal was unlawful.

THE sacked former director-general of the Prison Service, Derek Lewis, is to be given a £215,000 pay-off by the Home Secretary, Michael Howard, in settlement of his court action for unfair dismissal.

DOUGLAS HOUGHTON, who has died aged 97, was one of the few survivors in Parliament of the first world war — an experience which shaped many of his later concerns. He was a loyal supporter of Harold Wilson but always his own man.

THE last four RAF squadrons in Germany are to be pulled out, ending a deployment that began at the end of the second world war. RAF Bruggen, the only British air base remaining, will close in 2002.

THE LOYALIST ceasefire continued to disintegrate after an Ulster Volunteer Force bomb hoax at Dublin airport.

A CRIME bill to be introduced in the autumn will provide statutory powers for detectives to plant listening devices or cameras in the homes of suspects.

FOUR children under the age of 13 died after a suspected arson attack on a house in Southampton. The parents and an elder sister escaped from a first floor window.

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
May 12 1996

Spies and the ballot box

SPY CLAIMS and speculation that the Russian presidential election may be postponed has dramatically revived the dark art of Kremlinology. In both areas it is not so much what is said but how it is said that requires extensive analysis. The case of the alleged British spies has been denied by the Foreign Office. They are absolutely right, of course. Everyone knows that British diplomats keep their eyes open, the American ones gather intelligence, and it is only the Russians who actually spy. In real life it would be amazing if no one in the British embassy in Moscow were working for MI6 (the only question is how many). With the election in a month's time, inside political information gained by snooping of one kind or another will be more than usually prized. Nor should it be forgotten that both Russia and Britain have a vested interest in keeping a close watch on each other as competitive members of the nuclear club. The question remains why the publicity head of the successor to the KGB should have announced Moscow's "stern protest" at the use of the British embassy for "illegal spying activities". Could this by any chance be intended to pick up the patriotic vote for Boris Yeltsin?

Until Mr Yeltsin spoke out on Monday, repudiating the remarks of his security chief General Alexander Korzhakov, there were some doubts as to whether voting would take place at all on June 16. Gen Korzhakov, who had said that bloodshed might follow unless the elections were postponed, is no loose cannon. His views have prevailed on the president over such critical issues as oil export policy and the war in Chechenia. The notion of delaying the election has already been floated by lower-ranking officials, and Russian millionaire bankers and industrialists have also called for "compromise" between Mr Yeltsin and his communist rival, Gennady Zyuganov.

Gen Korzhakov also followed up his first warning with a second statement in an interview with a Russian news agency on Sunday. Was Mr Yeltsin really unaware of his aide's intention? On Monday the president said he had told Gen Korzhakov not to "get involved with politics". It is hardly surprising that some analysts will suspect there is more to the story, especially since Mr Yeltsin says he shares the view that a victory for Mr Zyuganov "would start a civil war". It may suit his purpose to have Gen Korzhakov raise the political temperature and then present himself as insisting on the democratic process — so long as people vote the right way.

Mr Yeltsin is doing slightly better in the polls. Those published at the weekend showed him running neck-and-neck with Mr Zyuganov or slightly ahead. A month ago he was trailing by at least six points. However, Russian commentators warn that voters have managed to disprove the polls already — particularly in the 1993 parliamentary election when the extreme nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovsky did far better than expected. This time, too, voters may be reluctant to reveal their intention to vote for an outspoken opposition candidate. There are also suspicions that the system of counting the votes, which is dominated by the president's people, may prove shaky. Many Russians believe that there has been falsification before. No one expects Mr Yeltsin to win outright in the first round. The second round — a run-off presumably with Mr Zyuganov — is seen as much more vulnerable. Monday's statement will not quell the speculation: meanwhile the Russian people await more important answers — about jobs, prices and the crisis of production — which Mr Yeltsin cannot deliver.

Were they just obeying orders?

THIS WEEK Dusko Tadic took his place in history. He is the first person since Nuremberg 50 years ago to stand trial in an international court on charges of crimes against humanity. Tadic, the "butcher of Prijedor", is charged with systematic brutality against Muslim civilians, including murder, rape, and torture. He is among more than 50 individuals indicted by the international criminal tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. Others include Bosnian Croats and Muslims, as well as Radovan Karadzic, the Bosnian Serb leader, and General Ratko Mladic, his military commander, who are indicted on 16 counts, including genocide.

Before the international community congratulates itself on this initiative, potentially of huge significance, we should consider the legacy of Nuremberg. Lord Shawcross, Britain's chief prosecutor, hailed the Nuremberg trial as a "milestone in the history of civilisation". It established the principle of individual responsibility for state crimes, that it was not enough to say "we were just obeying orders". Yet, as Richard Goldstone, the South African judge and chief prosecutor at the Hague tribunals for both Yugoslavia and Rwanda, has said: "The hope of 'never again' became the reality of again and again." Atrocities indicted as crimes at Nuremberg have gone unpunished, in Algeria, Cambodia, Vietnam, East Timor, Iraq, and elsewhere. The permanent members of the Security Council have supplied arms knowing they would be used, not only in war but also against ethnic minorities. So why did the Security Council agree to act on the former Yugoslavia? The short answer is embarrassment tinged, perhaps, with guilt. Here, in Europe, was ethnic cleansing, photographs of concentration camps reminiscent of the Holocaust, harrowing accounts of massacres, torture, and rape. Public opinion demanded action.

The very title of the Nuremberg trial, of "German Major War Criminals", gave away its limitations. Goldstone describes his strategy as investigating "lower-level persons involved in carrying out the crimes to build cases against the leaders". Time will tell if the tribunal will succeed. Defence lawyers are already arguing that it will hand down "victors' justice", ignoring the "dirty hands" of their prosecutors. In talks at the UN about setting up a permanent international criminal court, the US, Britain and France are insisting that the court must be a creature of the Security Council. To be credible and effective, a permanent court must be self-standing and independent.

Handguns must be banned now

A MIRACULOUS conversion occurred last week. The Unmagnificent Six appeared to be metamorphosing into the Responsible Sextet. No other group of UK ministers has been so ready to shoot from the hip as the current Home Office gang. Years of patient legislative preparation by predecessors have been torn up, shredded and tossed aside by the Michael Howard band. Yet last week one of the most unreconstructed members of the team, David Maclean, who is so ready to resort to knee-jerk reactions he is rarely let out, spoke out against knee-jerk legislation. Guns provide the explanation. Seven weeks on from the killing of 16 children and their teacher at Dunblane, ministers have already begun to fudge on tighter gun control. Doubters should listen to David Mellor, a former Conservative Home Office minister at the time of the Hungerford shootings, who has rightly warned of time running out on gun law reform.

Mellor was blunt about the 35 options which Home Office (and Scottish Office) ministers submitted to Lord Cullen's inquiry into the Dunblane shootings: "I personally think it was a serious error for the Home Office to queue up in front of Lord Cullen to put to him policy proposals that are really a matter for government to determine." And so say all of us. Or almost all except the Home Office ministers involved. David Maclean defended the delay by insisting "all the main parties have said we must resist knee-jerk legislation".

Of course it was right to set up the Cullen inquiry. Of course it is right for ministers to submit evidence. But if ministers were serious about tighter controls, they would have acted this session. Gun control is one issue where ministers do need to move with the tide. Although the British gun lobby is not as formidable as its American cousin, it remains a powerful body. This is why so many gaps remain in current UK controls. Take the biggest one of all: in 1988, as a response to the Hungerford shootings, semi-automatic rifles were prohibited but handguns, most of which are semi-automatic, were not. Yet handguns were also used by Michael Ryan at Hungerford — and Thomas Hamilton in Dunblane — to commit their grisly mass murders. In at least one respect handguns are even more dangerous than rifles — the ease with which they can be concealed. Just like a rifle, they are capable of rapidly firing many rounds without reloading. We should not need to wait for Cullen. They should be banned forthwith.

South African dream still lies in the balance

Martin Woollacott

WHEN historians reassess the South African revolution, they may well decide that the old regime gave up less because of pressure from its enemies, or because it belatedly realised its own wrongdoing, than because the inexorable forces of population growth and urbanisation were beyond its capacity to control.

The twisted form that modernisation took in South Africa turned impulses experienced by all societies, the mechanisation of agriculture and the movement to the cities, into the engines of truly menacing social changes. The National Party handed over power at precisely the moment when power had become a burden that was too much to bear.

Problems now stand at the centre of affairs, displacing the negotiation with old enemies and the creation of a new framework for government that has until now occupied so much time and taken so much energy. There may be some continued wrangling over the constitution, and there will be a multi-party government of national unity for a while longer. But the African National Congress will soon squarely face their legacy of vast social dysfunction, grotesque under-education, and armed anger.

White South Africans are now relieved, as a group, of both guilt and responsibility for those problems. In an ironic transformation, those who made the mess can now criticise those who have to try to clean it up. The anxieties and fears of whites, and of all middle-class South Africans of other colours, centre around the autocracy that people now sense in Nelson Mandela and around the enigmatic Thabo Mbeki, his likely successor.

In spite of the miracle of the negotiated revolution, signs of insecurity are everywhere in South Africa, from the barbed wire that decorates the suburbs to the falling rand. The desperate scale of the problems that face the country seem to demand a super-effective government.

Thus, every hint of corruption or incompetence can become, magnified, a harbinger of the banana republic that is the nightmare of white and black. But, in trying to measure these doubts and worries, it is worth remembering that insecurity has been a constant in South African politics from the beginning.

The attempt to create stability out of unpromising materials is the central strand of the country's history. For all the differences between previous regimes and the country's first multi-racial and democratic government, there are unexpectedly close parallels with the past.

Constitution making in 1910, when South Africa was created, and constitution making in 1996, when it is being recreated, revolve around similar themes and similar dangers. Racial reconciliation, centralisation of power, the question of labour, including immigrant labour, and the achievement of a social and economic stability satisfactory to that perennial arbiter of South African history, the "outside investor", were elements then as they are now.

There are also great differences. Above all, racial reconciliation in 1910 was narrowly between Boer and Briton, and at the expense of blacks. Labour, then, was scarce, whereas now there is an embarrassment of it, yet the question of labour at a "proper price" is as central today as it was 90 years ago.

The broad danger, too, is the same: that the price for stability which appeases local élites and satisfies the foreign investor is the exclusion of some large part of the population. Then, it was all blacks. Today, it would be a more complex, graded, exclusion of some sections of the black population. To say that this is a danger of which anybody in South Africa is unaware would be nonsense. It is the danger of which they are most aware.

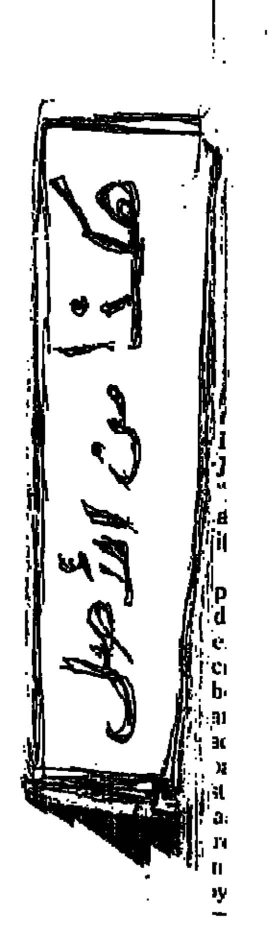
But being aware does not mean that it is easily avoided. Again, what links 1910 and 1996 is South Africa's curious combination of wealth and vulnerability. It is a semi-arid country which can be made to grow food and fibre in prosperous quantities but whose agriculture is always on the edge of viability. It has minerals, notably gold, but always, somehow, more difficult to extract than those in other mineral-rich countries. It can support a substantial manufacturing industry but one that has usually been of mediocre quality. It has exhibited a constant dependence on outside investment, and could become the prey of international capitalism.

The fragility of South African wealth is a weapon in the hands of those who want to defend the status quo, to keep wages low or drive them lower, to preserve patterns of land ownership, and to keep affirmative action in industry, government, and academic life to a minimum. But it is also true that the wrong policies on the land or in industry could damage the country's productive base, and its educational and professional standards are equally at risk.

THE NEED to steer a truly skilled course between these rocks is what makes the competence of ANC government so critical. Mr Mandela is a great man, one whose work is almost done. Mr Mbeki is a shadowy figure, outlines sketched by rumour and anecdote. Business likes him, liberals are uncertain. He is consolidating his position, and there have been casualties, including his rival for the succession Cyril Ramaphosa, and a particularly able minister, Pallo Jordan. There are signals that debate and participation within the ANC are not what they used to be.

Yet the future of South Africa will be best served by continued argument, in and out of government, that is conscious of South Africa's needs and fragilities. The country's history displays a strand of racial co-operation and common culture, mingling oppression with intimacy, in response to the difficulties of making a livelihood in the sub-continent.

This imperfect cross-racial tradition was sundered by agricultural modernisation and by the National Party's terrible ideological adventure, which abandoned what remained of human solidarity in a harsh country in favour of a brutal seizure of the majority's assets. The fragilities of South Africa can drive division or unity, depending on how they are approached. In spite of all the changes, that remains the message of its history.



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Paris insists on a role in Lebanon deal

COMMENT

FRANCE'S persistence eventually allowed it to play its part in the solution to the crisis in Lebanon. Along with Washington, Beirut and Damascus, Paris will form part of the international group" charged with monitoring the ceasefire that came into force on April 27 is respected. That alone should be a matter of satisfaction.

Sceptics will argue that it was the United States that played the decisive role in the settlement and will be chiefly responsible for its execution. And it was to Washington that Lebanon and Israel pledged to respect the new rules of the military game as defined by the agreement.

That deal more or less provides for a return to the status quo in force before the inglorious, as well as lethal and destructive, operation carried out by Israeli forces in Lebanon.

The US was careful not to make any promises about chipping in to help rebuild the civilian infrastructure destroyed by Israeli bombardment. As has happened before in the Middle East, it is the Europeans who are going to have to dip into their pockets.

In this respect, the French intervention in the conflict, initially greeted with enormous scepticism, was significant. The Europeans have long resented the way the US tends to monopolise the role of mediator in the Middle East peace process and restricts their contribution to that of peacetime bankrollers with no say in the course of events.

Although expected to pay up, the European Union (EU) had to be content with sitting in as an observer at the negotiating table. Thanks to the French intervention, the EU has now managed to reinforce its role in the region.

There is every justification for this, not only in the case of France — a country whose ties with Lebanon go back a long way — but as regards Europe as a whole, which extends over so much of the Mediterranean coastline.

All this has not been much to the liking of the US. Washington only reluctantly agreed to allow Paris to play the role it did. Right to the end, the US secretary of state, Warren Christopher, did his best to elbow his French opposite number, Hervé de Charette, out of the bargaining process.

President Jacques Chirac stuck to his guns, apparently determined to give substance to his ambitions in the Arab and Mediterranean arena — ambitions he outlined during his visit to Lebanon and Egypt in April.

But there were limits to the role France could play. Because it did no more than act generally in favour of a settlement, rather than work specifically as a mediator, France would not have been in the monitoring group had not Syria and Lebanon insisted that it should.

Israel, which trusts neither France nor Europe, did not want the French involved. That is why the EU finds the Middle East situation such hard going. If you want to act as a mediator, earn a place at the negotiating table and promote the peace process on an equal footing with the US, you need to be approached by both warring parties and to be in a position to lean on both of them.

Despite the positive role played by Paris in this latest tragic chapter of Lebanese history, that is not true of either France or the EU.

(April 28/29)



Mourners in Lebanon at a funeral in Qana last week for many of the 102 victims of an Israeli attack on a UN compound PHOTO: ALI MOHAMED

Church regrets its role in 'dirty war'

Christine Legrand in Buenos Aires and Henri Tincq

IN A document published on April 27 in Buenos Aires, the Argentine Catholic Church asked "forgiveness for the misdeeds that could be attributed to it". The Church fathers admitted that they had not been active enough in preventing the repression by the military regime during the "dirty war" in the 1970s, which resulted in thousands of people being killed or "disappeared". Human rights organisations put the number of victims who died or disappeared during the seven years of military terror at 30,000.

This belated admission of guilt comes a few months after the mothers of a number of the "disappeared" wrote to the Pope asking him to get the Argentine Church to make its position clear. A first step was taken in December, when the bishops made the following confession: "We did not succeed in measuring the gravity of the malady that was attacking the fabric of society. We erred out of a lack of realism."

That inadequate declaration was publicly criticised. The April 27 statement is clearer. The episcopate repents and "humbly" asks to be forgiven for the mistakes it made during the 1970s. It accepts that "Catholics justified systematic violence", and highlights the participation of "many sons of the Church" in "immoral and atrocious" acts of repression against guerrillas, acts "which shame us all".

Argentines have been waiting for this kind of document for 20 years. But it does not accept any direct responsibility on the part of the Church as an institution, stressing instead the fact that priests and Catholic activists were active in guerrilla movements as well as in the security forces.

The silence, not to say connivance, of the Argentine episcopate during the military dictatorship remains a mystery, particularly when it is compared with the response of the Chilean and Brazilian bishops, who were much more willing to attack their military regimes.

Argentine bishops were such zealous supporters of the regime that they even censored the celebrated prayer in the magnificat, which goes: "He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble and meek."

Their attitude was all the more surprising because Argentina was one of the Latin American countries, along with El Salvador, where the Church was hardest hit by civil war. One of its bishops, Mgr Angelleli, died in a mysterious car accident in 1976. Eleven priests and two nuns were murdered by security forces. And dozens of priests, seminarists, monks and lay preachers were imprisoned and tortured, or simply "disappeared".

Yet the Argentine episcopate, which is deeply divided in its attitude to that period, has not said a single word about that grisly record. Only a tiny minority of liberal-minded bishops, led by Mgr Miguel Hesayne, Archbishop of Viedma, has made any public attempt at face-saving. When the Pope visited Viedma in 1987, Mgr Hesayne made critical remarks about the Church, "which has not identified with the poor or the persecuted".

It took almost 10 more years for the Church in Argentina to come around to making a collective confession of guilt.

"This document makes a contribution to the pacification of Argentine society," said Senator Eduardo Vaca of the ruling Justicialist Party. "Its attitude should be imitated by all sections of society."

Members of human rights organisations, however, feel that the Church "has minimised its responsibilities". They reject the bishops' attempt to put guerrilla warfare and state terrorism on the same level by referring to the responsibility of "sons of the Church" in both camps.

The Nobel Peace Prize winner, Adolfo Perez Esquivel, said: "It's the theory of the two devils. The Church does not accept that there were victims of the military crackdown who had no connections at all with either camp." He regards the document as "totally watered-down" and says it is full of "evasive and uncourageous language".

(May 2)

Khartoum struggles to keep southern city

Jean Hélène in Juba

EVERY morning the drone of the first cargo aircraft wakes up the inhabitants of Juba, the largest city in southern Sudan. The city's lifeline to the capital, Khartoum, 1,300km away has been the airlift put in place when the second rebellion in the south began 13 years ago.

Juba, half of whose 180,000 inhabitants are refugees, is very different from the bustling, overcrowded Arab cities of the north. It looks like a typical sprawling African city, consisting mainly of mud and straw huts with a sprinkling of administrative buildings, churches, mosques and aid agency encampments. There are barracks everywhere — it is thought 50 per cent of the population is made up of soldiers.

Juba is isolated in the middle of bush controlled by the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). It depends for its survival on its international airport, almost as busy as Khartoum's, and on the White Nile, plied by the occasional heavily protected convoy of boats.

Paulino Laku Kedia, assistant governor of Bahr al-Jebel state, claims the province has been virtually liberated, though he admits that guerrilla forces have cut off roads to the north and to all neighbouring countries except Zaire.

Even though the SPLA is not right at the city gates, Juba is under siege. Its inhabitants fear being bombarded by rebel forces, which have succeeded in getting close enough to shell the town on four occasions since 1988.

The situation has been particularly precarious since the SPLA's major offensive in early November, which caused panic in Khartoum. The government thought it vital to hang on to a city it sees as symbolising Sudanese unity. So it pulled out all the stops to keep control of Juba: an airlift of nine daily flights over a five-week period made it possible to bring in enough troops, food and equipment to check a rebel advance along the Kit river, 60km south of the city.

But the fall of Pochala, on the Ethiopian border, in March revealed the existence of a new alliance between the SPLA and Ethiopia. This could prove dangerous even if, for the time being, regular troops control the environs of Juba as far as Yei, which lies 150km southwest of the city on the road to Zaire.

"You don't need an escort to drive there," says an aid worker. "But make sure you're not the first person to take that road in the morning, just in case rebels have laid mines during the night."

The ubiquitous security services keep a very close eye on all expatriates and visitors, and local inhabitants are nervous of being seen talking to foreigners. Few people are allowed outside Juba's perimeter, to prevent information being passed to the rebels.

In June 1992 the SPLA came close to taking Juba, after infiltrating it with a "fifth column". The ruthless crackdown that ensued is still fresh in everyone's mind. The so-called White House, where interrogations took place, is remembered with horror.

Although fertile, the surrounding countryside has been deserted as a result of the war, and Juba would survive for only three months at most on local farm output. In an attempt to reduce this costly reliance on food from outside, local government officials are granted two "farming days" a week so that they can work the land.

Sudan's Muslim leaders are still trying to divide the Christian and animist African tribes. They have been exploiting the hostility felt by the Bari and the Madi, the main local tribes in Juba, towards the Dinka (the largest ethnic group in southern Sudan and in the rebel army), who dominated them during the south's period of semi-autonomy from 1972 to 1983.

But neither that ploy nor the SPLA's divisions have given a decisive advantage to the Islamist regime in Khartoum.

(May 2)

Changing times leave Japan's pensioners out in the cold

Philippe Pons in Tokyo

THE couple were found dead in their car, huddled together in Shin Kiba, near an industrial zone east of Tokyo. Aged about 60, they had died of cold and undernourishment. The woman had apparently outlived her partner by a week.

They had been living in the car for four years. After being evicted from their flat because they could no longer afford the rent, they had packed what remained of their belongings into the car, an old model that suggested they must once have had a more affluent lifestyle, and set off to begin a new life as "travellers" in the big city.

When the man could no longer find odd jobs, the petrol ran out and the car came to a halt. An employee of a supermarket near where the car was parked, its tyres flat and windows covered with newspaper, remembers that two weeks before the bodies were found the woman had asked for some water. Neighbours said she had been a piano teacher. The couple's only possessions were a gas ring but no gas, some blankets and a few coins.

The proportion of elderly among the homeless in affluent Japan highlights the shortcomings of a system that is supposed to care for those who are no longer productive.

Anyone wishing to benefit from the state pension scheme must have contributed for at least 25 years. After 40 years' contributions, he or she is entitled to $680 a month. Those who have failed to contribute, or have not contributed enough, can apply for support to local authorities. But they must prove they are destitute and have no family. Many prefer to exclude themselves from society, and end up living under canvas in parks or in cardboard boxes in cellars or subways.

When France was brought to a standstill in December 1995 by strikers determined to hang on to their entitlements, there was a widespread feeling in Japan that France must be a very rich country if it could afford to do that kind of thing.



Home alone . . . The plight of the elderly homeless highlights the shortcomings of the system in Japan

Filial devotion used to be the keystone of a Japanese system of values bequeathed by Confucianism, but it has not survived urbanisation and the loosening of family ties: today, 85 per cent of Japanese die in hospitals or old people's homes.

Japan's population is ageing so fast that the government will be forced to reconsider its concept of the minimal state. The health ministry is looking into a system of home care for the old, expected to number 28 million by 1999. The scheme will serve as an example to the rest of Asia.

(April 26)

Cambodia's Chinese start to smile again

Jean-Claude Pomonti in Phnom Penh reports on the economic clout of an ethnic minority

LU IS a happy old man. Every morning, he crosses the boulevard to get a better look at his newly built four-storey hotel. In a few months' time, when the interior decoration is finished, his children will organise a lavish inauguration.

For the next two or three years Lu will not find it easy to fill his hotel. Since UN observers pulled out at the end of 1993, Phnom Penh's hotels have suffered from excess capacity. Room prices have gone through the floor, and several hotels have had to close.

But Lu is not too worried. With the security situation greatly improved, tourists are beginning to creep back. His 30-room hotel is well located in the centre of the Khmer capital, and has a good selection of dance halls, massage parlours and bars within walking distance. His children's future is assured.

Lu, who is a member of Cambodia's ethnic Chinese community, is lucky to be alive. He had a small grocery store before Cambodia was ravaged by war. When the Khmer Rouge emptied Phnom Penh of its population in 1975, he was separated from his family. Tens of thousands of ethnic Chinese died, and as many again sought refuge in neighbouring Vietnam.

Lu, who was sent to a forest-clearing camp on the Thai border, somehow managed to survive. When the Vietnamese army occupied Cambodia in 1979, overrunning the Khmer Rouge, he spent six months trying in vain to trace his family. Then came what he describes as "the happiest day of my life" when he arrived in the town of Kompong Thom. There, in the home of one of the few Chinese living there, he was reunited with his three sons and one of his daughters. His wife and other daughter had died of malnutrition and disease.

Lu returned with his four children to Phnom Penh, where he met a nephew who had occupied a two-storey building and an adjoining patch of waste land in the centre. Lu took over the city land and set up a stall selling bowls of Chinese soup. He saved enough to build a wooden shack, which in time turned into a café. Eventually, with the help of other members of the Chinese community, he was able to borrow enough money to go into business with his nephew. Together they built the hotel.

In accordance with a widespread Chinese custom, Lu remarried as he was approaching 70, this time to a woman 20 years his junior who could look after him in his old age

In 1994 he revisited Canton, the Chinese city from which his parents had emigrated when he was four, and located some distant cousins.

As Chinese schools were allowed to reopen in Cambodia in 1990, his grandchildren's education will not be a problem. Chinese community life has come back into its own.

Before the country was engulfed by hostilities in 1970, there were about 500,000 ethnic Chinese in Cambodia, 200,000 of them in Phnom Penh. Most came originally from Guangdong province. The government puts their present number at 300,000, with 80 per cent concentrated in the capital because several provinces remain unsafe.

To finance their projects they rely on help from wealthy overseas Chinese in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok and Hong Kong. They control the gold trade in the capital's central market. Chinese stalls are prominent in other smaller markets in Phnom Penh and provincial towns. Their signs, usually red and gold, are increasingly often written in Chinese characters.

Teng Boo Ma, president of Cambodia's new chamber of commerce and reportedly the wealthiest man in the country, is of Chinese origin. Of the 24 people who sit on the chamber's management board, 17 speak Chinese. The Association of Cambodian Chinese, reconstituted in 1990, has already opened 13 schools and restored five temples in Phnom Penh.

The Chinese are the biggest donors of funds to public projects. They contributed $400,000 towards the financing of a new boulevard overlooking the Mekong river in Phnom Penh — and named after Hun Sen, joint prime minister, who opened it in January. The state is strapped for cash and often calls on private capital to help finance public utilities, a practice also common in Thailand. In the two kingdoms, as in other countries in the region, politics and business make good bedfellows.

OVERSEAS Chinese, who act as economic pacemakers throughout southeast Asia, are leading foreign investors in Cambodia, which gets most of its aid from Western countries and Japan. When Cambodia joins the Association of South East Asian Nations, probably in 1997, that trend will probably gather momentum.

Overseas Chinese obtained several generous forestry concessions from the government last year — triggering a controversy in the process, when King Norodom Sihanouk said in February that deforestation constituted as great a threat to the country's survival as warfare.

The Chinese act as a useful channel for foreign capital because, after 25 years of war and massacres, Cambodia's business regulations remain ill-defined. It is therefore vital to have good contacts. In that respect the Chinese have a decisive advantage: they know the lie of the land and its politicians.

Foreign companies are moving into Cambodia fast. The Taiwanese group Tatung has decided on an initial investment of $26 million in an office equipment factory. Other Taiwanese firms have obtained licences to broadcast television programmes on six channels. The Thais and Singaporeans dominate the hotel sector. Malaysian Helicopter Systems has sunk $10 million into the relaunch of Royal Air Cambodge.

There would not be such interest in Cambodia had not the local Chinese community got its act together at the beginning of the nineties. Lu was not the only person to have made it thanks to the mutual aid networks based on trust that have re-formed in the past few years as a result of an improved business environment. Local authorities often turn for help to the Chinese, who arouse little resentment among Cambodians, whereas the tens of thousands of poor Vietnamese immigrant workers are generally unpopular.

Lu is not just content with saving money for his children, grandchildren and grandnephews. Worthy patriarch that he is, he likes to spend Sunday afternoons with his family a few kilometres north of Phnom Penh, in one of the 300 open-air restaurants which have mushroomed on the west bank of the Mekong, and which offer delicious dishes of game, fish and shellfish. The spot is a favourite meeting place of the capital's new bourgeoisie. It is there that local Chinese like to take their business partners from Bangkok or Singapore.

Dragon Air flights from Hong Kong to Phnom Penh are often packed with punters, who make for the capital's numerous authorised and clandestine gambling dens. Other services are provided by the city's more than 10,000 prostitutes, many of them children. Three golf courses backed by foreign capital, are due to open this year.

When the country was short of foreign capital, the royal government toyed with the idea of building a new town, provisionally called China-Cambodia City, on a huge site just south of Phnom Penh, with the aim of taking in up to 200,000 overseas Chinese, in particular those who decide to leave Hong Kong in 1997.

Although the project was shelved in 1994, it made it easier for parliament to pass a law on immigration, apparently tailor-made for Chinese investors, which specified that "aliens who have received an authorisation to invest, as well as members of their immediate family, are entitled to reside permanently in the kingdom of Cambodia".

The future looks rosy for the Chinese community. To be sure, the bribes they need to pay to get an authorisation or local police protection have increased in the past year. But the Chinese are old hands at such practices.

Thanks to local and overseas Chinese, Cambodia has slowly but surely been caught up in the momentum of its neighbours. The last real fighting against the Khmer Rouge is confined to the area near the Thai border. In the longer term, Cambodia is destined to become a country of tourism and transit between the two great cities of Bangkok and Ho Chi Minh City.

There are those who are taking advantage of Cambodia's still embryonic administration to deal in drugs; others have organised networks to help people in mainland China leave their country — many young refugees moulder in cheap Phnom Penh hotels waiting to get the passport that may enable them to join a relative somewhere else in the world.

Lu is right to feel confident about the future. The economic clout of local Chinese and the support they can muster from abroad are now such that any reversal of their fortunes seems unlikely. Lu would like to go on one last trip to Canton, home of his ancestors. His three sons and his nephew are, after all, old enough now to keep the family concern on a profitable course.

(April 24)

U.N. Says Israel Took Aim at Qana Camp

John M. Goshko

THE ISRAELI artillery shelling that killed about 100 civilian refugees at a U.N. base in southern Lebanon last month was triggered when Lebanese Hezbollah guerrillas fired rockets into Israel from two nearby locations and then took refuge inside the base, according to a U.N. investigation of the incident.

Whether Israel retaliated by deliberately firing at the base is still being debated by senior U.N. officials, according to sources familiar with the inquiry. Some said the evidence points to a conclusion that the Israelis acted deliberately, but others said more information is needed before a judgment can be made.

The sources were referring to the findings of a still secret and incomplete probe conducted by Dutch Brigadier General Frank Van Kappen, a military adviser to Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. The sources, citing the sensitive nature of the situation, all refused to be identified more closely. Some have seen all or part of Van Kappen's draft, and some acknowledged that their information was second hand.

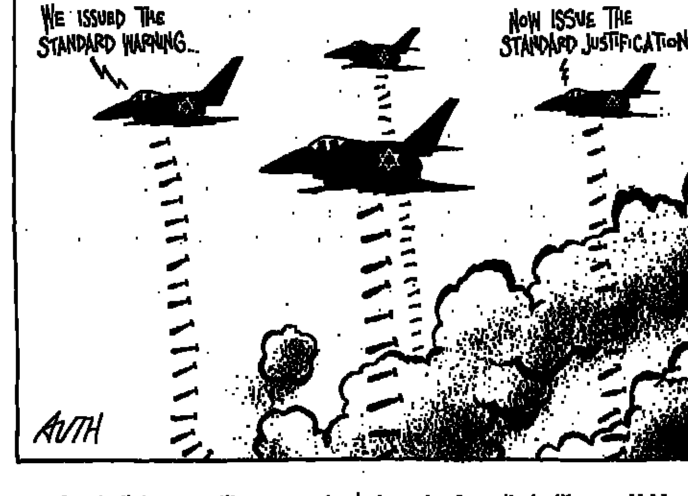
Immediately after the artillery blitz on April 18, there were reports that guerrillas from Hezbollah, a militant Shiite Muslim militia, had fired Katyusha rockets across the Israeli border from at least one location near the U.N. base at Qana. However, there previously had been no information that at least some of the guerrillas fled into the camp and were there when the Israelis launched their bombardment.

Israeli military officers knew the U.N. camp was filled with civilian refugees, and the death toll drew world-wide criticism. It also led President Clinton to send Secretary of State Warren Christopher to broker a cease-fire.

Israel steadfastly has denied that it intentionally attacked the camp. It said it was retaliating against the site nearby from which Hezbollah had fired the rockets, and a top Israeli general said on the day of the assault that his gunners had overshot their mark. But some of the sources here said that the initial draft of Van Kappen's report cited the available evidence as pointing to an informed judgment that Israel knew it was firing at the camp.

However, other sources, including at least one who has seen Van Kappen's draft, said the question of Israel's intent was still open, with one comparing it to "the missing piece in a jigsaw puzzle." These sources said that in hopes of answering that question more definitively, senior U.N. officials have asked the Israeli government for more detailed information and are awaiting a reply.

Some diplomats at the United Nations have suggested that the United States, which had backed Israel's air, ground and sea incursions into Lebanon as legitimate self-defense, might be exerting pressure to ensure that the report does not blame Israel for deliberately targeting the base. U.S. officials said they would have no comment at this time, but diplomats friendly to the Jewish state emphasized that Van Kappen's investigation had established conclusively that Hezbollah guerrillas were in the camp at the time it was attacked.



According to the various sources, Van Kappen's investigation determined that guerrillas opposing Israel's continued occupation of a "security zone" strip of land in southern Lebanon had been moving in and out of the U.N. camp manned by Fijian peacekeeping troops since the Israeli offensive against Hezbollah began on April 1. Some of the guerrillas even had their families living among the refugees who had flocked to the camp in hopes that the U.N. flag would protect them from Israeli shelling.

The sources said the guerrillas, working in small groups of two or three, established a pattern of coming out of the camp to lob mortar-launched rockets into Israel and then fleeing back inside. The Fijian troops were unable to force them out, and in one clash the week before the Israeli shelling, a U.N. soldier was shot in the chest.

The Israelis were aware that guerrillas were using the camp, the sources said, but avoided firing on it prior to the April 18 bombardment. On that date, the sources said, guerrillas launched rockets into Israel from locations 500 meters and 200 meters from the camp, after which at least two or three ran inside. An Israeli reconnaissance drone flying over the area relayed information back on the sites from which the rockets were fired, and Israeli gunners then launched the bombardment that leveled the U.N. camp.

The United Nations has asked Israel to give it the information collected by the reconnaisance drone and to explain how it was used in the subsequent Israeli targeting decisions. The sources said there was no indication yet of whether Israel will comply.

Serbs Stir Hatred of Muslim Neighbors

John Pomfret in Kapetani

THE FACT that Zijad Kapetanovic has a hard head might have saved his life last week. Kapetanovic, his 17-year-old daughter and his wife, all Muslims, were attempting to visit their homes for the first time in four years when they were caught in an ambush set by armed Serbs — the same men who rousted them from this quaint hillside farming village in 1992. One man carrying a 4-foot plank slipped up behind Kapetanovic and whacked him in the back of the head.

"You, too, have come back," Kapetanovic remembered the Serb's telling him before he was sent sprawling.

Kapetanovic was one of the luckier ones. The Serb attack left two Muslims dead. While a statement by officials of the NATO peacekeeping force in Bosnia said the Muslims probably died after fleeing into a minefield, NATO officers and witnesses said Serb gunfire was actually to blame.

The Serb ambush of the group of unarmed Muslims in the rolling hills of northwestern Bosnia was the most serious clash between Bosnia's warring parties since a peace pact was negotiated in Dayton, Ohio, in November and signed in Paris the following month. It follows a pattern of assaults, demonstrations and intimidation that have marked the latest phase of the implementation of the peace deal.

Western officials say the problem is that Serbs do not want Muslims to return home, although the Dayton accord clearly gives them that right. The Serbs forced 1 million Muslims from their homes throughout northern and eastern Bosnia under a policy that came to be known as "ethnic cleansing." Bosnian Serb nationalist leaders worry that allowing even some of those people to return would undercut everything they fought for: an ethnically pure state and an ideology of separatism and nationalism.

"This is going to be the next challenge of the Dayton accord: Will people be allowed to return home?" said Margriet Prins, an official with the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees in the northeast Bosnian city of Tuzla.

The struggle for Kapetani exemplifies a contest all around Bosnia for the future of this country. If people can go home, then Bosnia has some hope of patching together some semblance of its historical multiethnic society in which people lived in peace and, despite prejudices, sought to express their differences through means other than mass rape and executions, imprisonment and ambushes.

If those who fled cannot go home, then Bosnia risks partition into three ethnically homogeneous ministates — Muslim, Croat, and Serb.

That, U.S. diplomats say, would lead to disaster. The Serb and Croat states would be tempted to nibble at the Muslim state, which they surround. And the Muslim state, desperate for support, would be an easy target for radical Islamic elements from the Middle East seeking a base in Europe.

The regional balance of power has little to do, however, with Kapetanovic's desire to go home. His problems, while more prosaic, are just as pressing.

Kapetanovic, 42, a construction worker, has lived with his family in a two-room shack in a village less than a mile from Kapetani since Serbs chased his family from their house four years ago. His landlord is dropping hints that the sooner he and the rest of his family leave, the better.

The reason is that other refugees are slowly returning to Bosnia and space around Kapetanovic's adopted village of Lukavica is getting tight. People have started trickling back from Germany, Sweden and other European countries that took them in when war erupted in Bosnia in 1992.

Prins said the trickle is expected to turn into a flood in July, after Europe's school year ends. Then, thousands of Bosnian families could pack up their children and come home. European countries are also threatening to revoke the refugee status of many of these people, which would force them back anyway.

Kapetanovic joined about 400 other Muslims on Monday last week on an organized return to Kapetani and a neighboring village. Under a deal worked out in meetings with Swedish NATO officers, Bosnian Serb police had pledged they would escort the Muslims into the town, let them visit a graveyard there and escort them out.

But the Serb police never showed up, and, after waiting for four hours at a NATO checkpoint, about 50 Muslims decided to walk home.

At first the journey was trouble-free. Kapetanovic, his wife, Mirsada, and daughter Elvira found their house; only a roof and a frame remained of the two-story structure. Everything else — windows, floors, furniture — had been carted away by looting Serbs.

When the group neared the cemetery, shots rang out. Serb thugs had positioned themselves in a meadow on both sides of the road. One Serb tossed a hand grenade at the Muslim group. Several of the Serbs then charged the crowd wielding truncheons and clubs. In the panic, one Muslim woman ran into a minefield and lost her leg in an explosion.

Two Muslim men were killed immediately, shot in the chest at point-blank range. At least 10 other Muslims were wounded.

Swedish NATO troops who were supposed to ensure that fighting did not flare up in this area, which is part of the 2.5-mile zone of separation running along Bosnia's old factional battle lines, apparently failed to disarm the Serbs.

Under the Dayton agreement, no weapons are allowed in this area. The Muslims were unarmed.

U.S. Setting Bad Example To the World

EDITORIAL

THE United Nations has technically run out of money. The cause: Member countries that haven't anted up their dues. The biggest debtor by far: the United States.

The United Nations won't have to lock its doors and sell the office furniture, because it can dip into its separate peacekeeping budget to stay afloat. But that kind of forced budgetary gimmickry isn't without cost. Countries that have provided troops for peacekeeping missions in the past are less likely to do so in the future if they're not confident of getting reimbursed. As a result, the criteria for U.N. involvement get stiffer and stiffer. It's possible, for example, that a relatively small U.N. commitment to peacekeeping in Liberia could have prevented the recent descent into chaos there, with the attendant misery for Liberians, danger for Americans and costs to the U.S. military. But when the time was ripe, the United Nations wasn't prepared to take on another job.

This isn't all bad, as Republicans in Congress have pointed out. In the first part of this decade, U.N. peacekeeping commitments ballooned, with the number of blue-helmeted troops skyrocketing from 10,000 to 90,000. Today there are 30,000. The U.N. bureaucracy, while shrinking, still has fat to trim.

But the proper response isn't to withhold money that the United States unquestionably owes. Congress this year appropriated almost enough to meet current-year obligations, but accumulated debt still tops $1 billion — more than what will likely be owed, at year's end, by all other U.N. members combined. This reflects not only concern about bureaucratic bloat but general Republican hostility toward the United Nations.

Such an attitude is exceedingly shortsighted. The portrayal of the United Nations as an instrument of U.S. foreign policy is truer today than it has been in a long time. Almost every costly U.N. mission — in Bosnia, Iraq, the Middle East, Angola and elsewhere — is advancing U.S. goals. In Haiti, the United Nations authorized what amounted to a friendly U.S. invasion, then provided cover for a U.S. troop withdrawal. It makes no sense for the United States to break the rules and reduce its leverage.

U.N. Ambassador Madeleine Albright last week asked Congress to authorize payment of the U.S. debt over a five-year period in return for closer consultation on future peacekeeping missions and continuing U.N. reform. It's a reasonable proposal, and Congress should agree. At the moment, the United States isn't setting much of an example.

Clinton Sets Teen Welfare Standards

Barbara Vobejda

PRESIDENT Clinton announced last weekend a series of executive actions to force states to end welfare benefits to teenage parents who refuse to finish school or live with a responsible adult.

The directive was aimed at correcting what is considered one of the most glaring weaknesses in the nation's welfare system, payment of benefits to young, unmarried mothers who often move out of their homes, end their education and fall into long-term dependency on welfare.

"We have to make it clear that a baby doesn't give you a right and won't give you the money to leave home and drop out of school," Clinton said in his weekly radio address.

While about half the states have provisions aimed at keeping teenage parents on welfare in school and at home, the president's action eventually will result in a national ban on payments to those who refuse.

In an election year when welfare is likely to figure prominently, last Saturday's announcement allows Clinton the upper hand, if temporarily, to claim that he has made progress on the issue while the Republican Congress remains stalled on new legislation to overhaul the welfare system. The Clinton administration has granted "waivers" allowing a majority of states leeway from federal rules to experiment in their welfare programs.

Republicans are divided about whether to send the president new legislation. *However, they repeated* their claim that Clinton has stood in the way of welfare reform by vetoing legislation passed by Congress last year.

"Bill Clinton and the liberals in Washington are still missing the point: real welfare reform is long overdue," said Michigan Governor John Engler, in a statement released by the Republican Governors Association, which he chairs. "We can't reform welfare and break the cycle of poverty one waiver at a time."

Clinton said he vetoed the welfare bill because it went too far in cutting spending for the poor and making huge changes in foster care, aid for disabled children and the food stamp and school lunch programs. He also said it did too little to help move people from welfare into the work force.

Clinton said that if Congress sends him a "clean welfare reform plan, that demands work, demands responsibility, protects children and helps families stay together, I will sign it. Until then, I'll keep working to do everything in my power to reform welfare step by step and state by state."

Compared to four years ago, the president said, welfare and food stamp rolls are down, teenage pregnancy rates have declined and more welfare recipients are working. Much of that has happened, he said, because his administration has granted 37 states "waivers" allowing flexibility in administering Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), the basic cash welfare *program.*

While a major redesign of the welfare system along the lines proposed by Clinton in 1994 or the Republican plan last year would require a change in federal law, the president can order some changes administratively, such as those he made last week. Last summer, for example, he announced that states proposing certain changes in their welfare programs, such as work requirements or beefed up child support enforcement, would essentially be given automatic approval by the federal government.

'The only way for teen mothers to escape the welfare trap is to live at home and stay in school'

Welfare reform efforts proposed by Republicans and Democrats have focused heavily on teenage parents, in part because they are the group most likely to become long-term welfare recipients. Half of all adults on AFDC, about 2 million people, had their first children when they were teenagers. And only about half of adults on welfare have high school degrees. There are no firm numbers about how many unmarried teenagers are on welfare. About half a million babies are born each year to teenagers, *most of whom are unmarried.*

Under the new plan, the first of four steps would require all states to keep teenage mothers in school, denying benefits to those who drop out and do not take steps to complete their high school educations.

Twenty-six states, including Virginia and Maryland, have such provisions and the president's order would require other states to adopt such a measure. He said the administration would audit the progress of every state and make the results public.

The second step will allow states to raise the benefits of teenage parents who stay in school. States can already lower benefits for teenagers who drop out of school but until now could not pay a bonus for those who stay in school without receiving a federal waiver. Last week's action removes the need for a waiver.

That approach, which has been in place in Ohio since 1989, has improved high school graduation rates significantly, according to a study released last month.

The third step orders states to require any teenage mother on welfare who has already dropped out to return to school or work toward a high school equivalency degree. These teenagers must also sign a "personal responsibility plan." Under the plan, unmarried teen*agers under age 18 receiving* welfare must agree to stay at home with a legal guardian, except in abusive and certain other circumstances, help establish paternity and obtain child support and, in some cases, attend parenting classes.

Finally, the president urged states to require that teen mothers *on welfare live at home or with* a responsible adult. Although states have the authority to keep teenagers on welfare at home, only 21 states, including Virginia and Maryland, have such provisions in place.

"The only way for teen mothers to escape the welfare trap is to live at home, stay in school and get the education they need to get a good job," Clinton said in his address. "We must make sure the welfare system demands that teen mothers follow the responsible path to independence."

A study released last week by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation found that the Ohio program, known as LEAP — Learning, Earning and Parenting — increased high school completion rates by nearly 20 percent among AFDC teenagers already enrolled in school when they entered the program. Employment rates among the same group increased by 40 percent.

Teenage parents in LEAP receive an additional \$62 a month welfare benefits if they attend school regularly. But if they drop out or have too many unexcused absences, their benefit is reduced by \$62 a month.

Neither school completion nor employment rates was improved for those teenagers on welfare who had *already dropped out of school when* they were enrolled in the LEAP program.

African Women Fight Abuse

Stephen Buckley in Nairobi

AFTER more than 30 years of being threatened, chased, slapped, thrown, punched, kicked, choked, whipped and stepped on by her husband, Agnes summoned the strength last winter to take an unusual step for an abused African wife. She left.

More unusual is that she found solace in a home in Nairobi that serves battered women. It is the first such shelter in Kenya, where spousal abuse — as in the rest of sub-Saharan Africa — is a not-so-hidden shame.

From Sudan to South Africa, from Mali to Mozambique, spousal abuse is among sub-Saharan Africa's best-known and least-discussed secrets, a problem far more pervasive but much less addressed than other social ills, such as AIDS.

Over the centuries in most African societies, battering one's wife has become both a right and a rite. In some ethnic groups, social workers say, if a man's wife dies before he has assaulted her, he must prove his manhood by beating her corpse. In addition, economic dependence on men, cynical police officers and judges, and even scorn from other women, have long forced abused wives to silently swallow their pain.

Perhaps most powerful is the African notion that the family is a bastion of privacy, in which unpleasant matters especially must be shielded from public scrutiny.

"The biggest problem is that nobody wants to talk about it," said Anne Ngugi, director of the Women's Rights Awareness Program, or Wrap, which opened the home for battered women in which Agnes found solace. "It comes down to people feeling that it [violence against women] is part of African tradition, and so people must keep quiet."

A recent survey taken by Ngugi's organization in Kenya revealed a high awareness of violence against women, but little resolve to tackle the problem.

More than 70 percent of those surveyed — both men and women — said they knew that wife beating occurred in their neighborhood. Yet nearly 60 percent of respondents said women were always or sometimes responsible for the beatings they suffered. About 51 percent said that men who batter women should not be punished.

Battered wives thus rarely go to the police. Asked how women who are being beaten should respond, only 3 percent of those surveyed said that the victim should seek help from law enforcement authorities. In rare cases that make it through Kenya's justice system, assailants typically receive a small fine.

During her three decades as a battered wife, Agnes — who is now 60 and asked not to be fully identified — never called the police. She did not tell co-workers. She did not tell friends.

"The police would have taken a bribe from my husband, and then they would have left, and he would have beaten me again," said the former teacher. She did not tell those closest to her because "I was so scared, and I was feeling so embarrassed."

Agnes, whose husband also was a teacher, said the violence began a few years after she got married, when she caught her husband in bed with a teenage girl. He began to beat her every evening. He forced her to give him her paycheck. He called her his slave.

Activists say it is not unusual for African women to stay in such situations for decades. In most African homes, women are generally less educated than their husbands and often do not have professional skills, leaving them economically bound to the men.

"A lot of these women try to protect the marriage because marriage gives you high status," said Lucy Njeri Karuru, Kenyan coordinator for Women and Law in East Africa, a research group with offices here, in Tanzania and in Uganda. "And if they divorce, society, including their women friends, will not look upon that favorably."

Janet Kabeberi-Macharia, regional coordinator for the research group, said part of the problem is that spousal abuse falls under the general category of "physical assault" in Kenya. "A more specific law would help to let people know that this specific act is wrong. As it stands now, a lot of men — and women — think that beating your wife is something you do if you really care about her."

Court to Review Law's Curb On Death Penalty Appeals

Joan Biskupic

THE Supreme Court announced last week it will review the constitutionality of a new law limiting federal appeals by state death row prisoners. The order is likely to halt most executions in the United States for at least the next two months.

The justices, who already had finished oral arguments for the term, put the case from Georgia on an unusually expedited schedule, with oral arguments scheduled for June 3, apparently with the intent of reaching a decision before going on recess in late June. At issue is a provision of the anti-terrorism law signed by President Clinton last month intended to reduce the number of court petitions that can be filed by condemned inmates. The Supreme Court's conservative majority led by Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist has favored measures to shorten the often protracted appeals process in death penalty cases.

The court's four liberal-leaning justices protested on Friday last week that the court was taking up the matter too quickly, saying the issues "should be undertaken with the utmost deliberation, rather than unseemly haste."

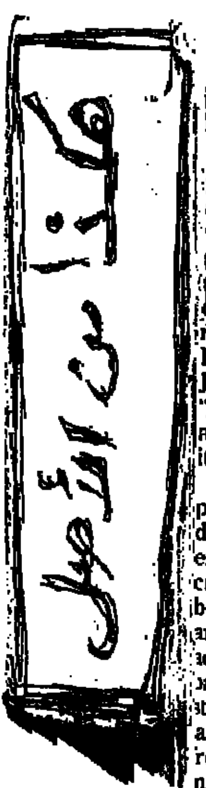
The challenge to the law was made by Ellis Wayne Felker, who had been scheduled to die last week for the 1981 murder of a 19-year-old woman who met Felker while looking for a job to pay for college. Felker was convicted of raping, sodomizing and murdering Evelyn Joy Ludlam after reportedly luring her to his home by promising her work at his leather shop. Felker, who was convicted in 1983, insists he is innocent. His execution has been postponed while the court hears the case.

More than 3,000 prisoners are on death rows across the country. Felker's petition — the first to reach the court under the new procedures — also tests the authority of Congress to take power away from the federal courts.

The controversial provisions of the anti-terrorism statute restrict the ability of federal judges to hear state prisoner's appeals, known as petitions for writ of habeas corpus, and require judges to defer to state court determinations on whether a prisoner's constitutional rights were violated.

While the immediate effect of last week's order was to bring scheduled executions to a virtual halt, if the court upholds the law, the result actually will be fewer delays in executions because the challenged statute sets tight deadlines and limits the ability of a prisoner to win last-minute federal review.

Columbia law professor James Steven Liebman, an expert in the area, said that most prisoners who are about to die attempt to get a federal court to intervene. Those closest to execution are also those most likely to be filing successive petitions and most affected by the new law.



Married to a Mob

Roxana Robinson

TALES OF BURNING LOVE
By Louise Erdrich
HarperCollins. 452pp. $25

IN LOUISE ERDRICH's fiction we expect issues of love, pain and family, a cast of American Indians, and a setting in the austere and beautiful North Dakota landscape. In Tales Of Burning Love, her new novel, these expectations are met, but everything is different. The landscape, instead of being somber and overcast by a darkening sense of tragedy, is vividly illuminated by bolts of freewheeling lunacy: This is a mad Gothic comedy.

The title sets the tone, with its playful overtones of cliché, passion and melodrama. Gleefully, Erdrich sets out to explore a wide spectrum of gaudy emotional states. These range from an ancient nun's unsettling devotion to God to a schizophrenic's desperate attachment to the husband she lies to and steals from. Passionate love — weird, thwarted and ecstatic — is the unifying theme.

The riotously complex story centers around Jack Mauser and his five wives. Jack is a handsome German-Indian contractor with a quick temper, a drinking problem, and a deeply flawed approach to finance. His life is a trampled battleground, due to the struggle between his two primal instincts: the urge to survive, and the equally powerful urge to self-destruct. The novel opens in 1972, with his first wedding: in a bar, to a stranger, in an alcoholic haze. The narrative proceeds with energy and speed, forwards and backwards, in real time and flashbacks, narratives and conversations. By 1995, Mauser's fifth wife has left him and he faces bankruptcy. Naturally, he gets drunk and burns his house down.

After Jack's funeral, four of his ex-wives are improbably trapped in a car during a howling snowstorm. The first wife, June, is the absent one. She was poor, a single mother, and Indian (Erdrich, who is one, doesn't use the term "Native American"). Eleanor, the second, is white, intellectually pretentious, appallingly self-absorbed, sexually predatory, and the most passionately attached to Jack. Candice, the third, is white, a dentist, ambitious, compulsive and deeply controlling. Marlia, the fourth, is white, a blackjack dealer, alarmingly ruthless, totally exploitative and frankly nuts, with the most vividly inventive approach to life. The last wife, Dot, is Chippewa, and Jack's accountant. She's also married to the Indian Gerry Nanapush, who's in prison for life.

Erdrich exploits the savory possibilities of the situation to the full. "Suddenly [the trapped wives] were screaming. And why not? They had all at one time been married to the same man. Each woman had seen the others as usurpers . . . sluts driven by the same lusts that they treasured as sublime in their own hearts, but despised emanating from any other source. They had boiled their hatred to a dense jam, enriched and condensed it over years . . . Ripe fury had escaped and it was delicious. Hot, wholesome and filling."

The wives are in peril, however, and declare a truce. To keep from freezing, they keep each other awake by recounting their marriages. They produce an opulent string of Sheherezade's tales, unlikely, erotic, dazzling and often hilarious. Each woman's voice rises alone with her story, then falls beneath the next, like strands in a long thick braid.

Everyone here is driven by love, but it's love at its most adolescent and selfish. Honor, duty and principle play no part, nor does responsibility. It is impulse, emotion and chance that rule; consequences are of no consequence. These characters just seize the moment and hold on. A respected woman professor seduces, taunts and sexually humiliates a student, destroying his self-esteem and her future, out of irritable boredom. A man trying merely to visit his small son finds himself trussing up the baby sitter and kidnapping the child.

Erdrich revels in all of this — the physical disorder, emotional chaos, the succulent awfulness of the characters. The nature of comedy is brief, episodic and superficial, and the strength of this narrative derives not from character and sympathy but velocity and invention.

Moreover, Erdrich's more familiar dramatic voice is not absent. It recurs throughout this exuberant frolic as a quiet counterpoint. Jack, falling asleep, remembers his long-dead Indian mother: "Stark-boned, filling up the wide screen of his consciousness, she smiled . . . Just at the instant he entirely surrendered to sleep he saw her once again, swooping down, his earliest memory."



ILLUSTRATION: ANTHONY RUSSO

The Walking Wounded

Marc Leepson

THE NAMES OF THE DEAD
By Stewart O'Nan
Doubleday. 399pp. $23.95

IT'S BEEN said that only the psychologically disturbed are not disturbed psychologically after returning home from fighting in a brutal war. Larry Markham, the everyman protagonist of Stewart O'Nan's masterful novel The Names Of The Dead, is no exception. He went through a mind-numbing 11 months as a combat medic in Vietnam during the war's height. Thirteen years later in 1982, Larry experiences frequent daytime flashbacks and recurring horrific nightmares stemming from a charnel-house tour that ended when he stepped on a land mine and lost part of a leg.

To his credit, Larry takes satisfaction in his job as a snack-cake delivery man in his hometown of Ithaca, N.Y. But everything else in his life is in serious disarray. His wife is considering leaving him for another man. His severely retarded son is a constant drain on Larry's emotional reserves. His difficult, elderly father's health is failing precipitously. He finds himself helplessly attracted to the sexy, seriously unbalanced woman who lives next door.

One other thing. A mysterious psycho killer is on Larry's trail. The stalker, a former Army assassin, hints ominously that he is seeking revenge for something Larry did in Vietnam. Amid all his other troubles, Larry cannot figure out what he did to enrage the man.

Larry Markham's life before, during and after his service in Vietnam is the subject of O'Nan's exceptionally well crafted, dense novel, the author's second. At times, especially in the Vietnam sequences, the details of Larry's life are painful to read. But in O'Nan's hands, The Names Of The Dead is compelling, propelled by a fast-moving plot, crisply realistic dialogue, vivid evocations of place and sharp insights into the protagonist's psyche.

O'Nan tells two interconnected stories in alternating chapters: Larry's brutal, psychically numbing Vietnam War story (with flashbacks to his childhood) and his seemingly endless 1982 post-war troubles. The chapters set in Vietnam by themselves make a top-quality literary war story. O'Nan, who teaches writing at Trinity College in Connecticut, did not serve in Vietnam. He was too young. But he obviously did an enormous amount of research.

O'Nan presents an astonishing amount of on-the-money detail about the everyday lives of infantrymen in Vietnam. The book's Vietnam sections are as realistically drawn as anything in print.

Here's one example, in which O'Nan runs down a partial list of "dos" and "don'ts" Larry is bombarded with by the men in his squad soon after he arrives at a remote fire base in the jungles of Vietnam:

"Always wear your pistol. Never wear your [steel] pot on patrol 'cause you can't hear a goddamn thing with it on. Wear it backwards so the lip doesn't get in the way. Stay off roads; stay off trails; stay off paddy dikes. Don't bunch up on me or I'll cut your [expletive] heart out. Cut the sleeves off that jacket or you'll sweat to death. Wear just the T-shirt. Wear just the jacket. Slit your pants so you get some air in there. Don't bother with underwear 'cause it just rots off. Don't eat the [C-ration] ham and mothers. Don't trade your spaghetti and meatballs for anything. Watch out for the kids. Watch out for mama-san. Watch out for papa-san. Don't go [expletive] with baby-san."

The Names Of The Dead contains more than a few close-up, graphically described scenes of violent death on the battlefield, including O'Nan's version of Larry's platoon's participation in the vicious May 1969 battle that became known as Hamburger Hill. Perhaps O'Nan could have condensed some of those scenes and still conveyed the horror of war. The book's final payoff mildly disappoints.

These are minor missteps, however. O'Nan writes brilliantly about a war in which he did not serve decades after it ended. That alone is a noteworthy accomplishment.

Working in a Theatrical Vein

Karl Beckson

BRAM STOKER
A Biography of the Author of 'Dracula'
By Barbara Belford
Alfred A. Knopf. 381pp. $30

WHAT A splendid subject to sink one's teeth into! Celebrated in eerie detail in folklore, fiction, drama and movies, vampires have been sucking blood from audiences that never seem to weaken in their fascination with the "un-dead." In her lively and informative biography, Barbara Belford suggests reasons why such creatures not only keep us awake at night but also enter our fantasies by day: Vampires evoke unconscious impulses associated with primitive sexual drives — indeed, these threatening creatures are the very embodiments of our own desires and fears, which are projected outward to safeguard our moral rectitude.

As might be expected, psychoanalytic critics have had a field day with Bram Stoker's Dracula (1897), which includes, among other perversions, symbolic penetration when the count sucks "blood/semen," thereby confusing gender roles, and when Lucy, transformed into a vampire, simulates an orgasm when the phallic stake is driven into her heart. Yet, throughout the novel, as Belford remarks, there is no "real sex" or "lovemaking."

Dracula dominates Belford's biography, as perhaps it should, since Stoker's other novels are of little significance. The subtitle announces Belford's principal focus, and each chapter begins with a quotation from the novel. Moreover, throughout her biography, Belford cites what she regards as parallels between certain events in Dracula and those in Stoker's life. Indeed, she contends, the work is Stoker's "most autobiographical novel."

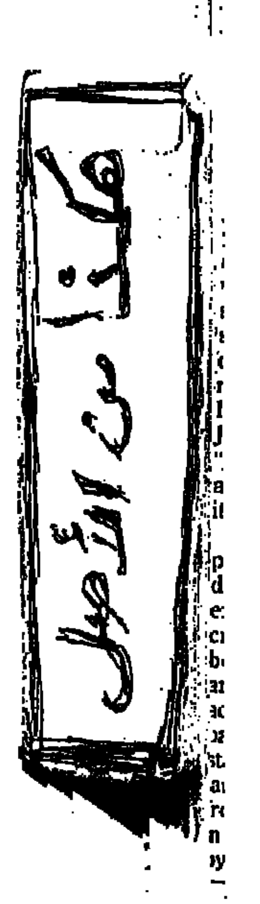
In addition to the focus on Stoker's masterpiece, Belford's rich evocation of the London theatrical scene is engrossing and informative. Much of the book is virtually a dual biography of Stoker and the great actor/manager Henry Irving: For 27 years, Stoker was Irving's business manager, principally at the Lyceum Theatre. Irving, a demanding perfectionist, was sometimes seclusive despite his flamboyance on stage; and Stoker, equally demanding in seeing that everything ran smoothly at the Lyceum and on their American tours, got on well with Irving only when Stoker deferred to him, especially in matters of stage production.

In one of her simplistic parallels between Dracula and Stoker's life, Belford states that Stoker "indentured" himself to Irving as his protagonist Renfield — transformed into a vampire — bound himself to Count Dracula. Indeed, she goes even further by asserting that "a close relationship between any two people, in fact, almost always involves vampiric exploitation." And because Irving was attracted to roles involving characters at once weird and theatrical, Belford asserts that Dracula is "all about Irving as the vampire . . ." However, Irving was not essential for the creation of Dracula, for Stoker drew upon folklore, history, and previous fictional accounts of vampires in creating the count.

Belford contends that Irving was not the only contemporary figure whom Stoker pressed into service in writing his novel: Stoker's friendship with Walt Whitman leads her to the questionable conclusion that the poet's influence on Dracula was "profound . . . particularly since the vampire at times resembles Whitman. Each has long white hair, a heavy moustache, great height and strength, and a leonine bearing."

Stoker's friends and acquaintances included not only Whitman but also such figures as Oscar Wilde, Mark Twain, Bernard Shaw and the actress Ellen Terry. Belford's skillful handling of the biographical material results, in part, from the use of unpublished manuscripts that previous biographers have ignored. She also convincingly disposes of the conclusion by Stoker's great-nephew, Daniel Farson, in his 1975 biography, that Stoker died of tertiary syphilis in 1912 at the age of 65.

In Belford's highly readable account, Stoker achieves new life, as does his "un-dead" masterpiece.



Opportunities Abroad

Social Development Advisers (2 posts)

Education Field Management Office/Health Field Management Office

The British Council in India is seeking two experienced Social Development Advisers, one each for the Education Field Management Office (FMO) and Health FMO.

The Education FMO manages the entire portfolio of ODA funded education projects in India. The projects with which the successful applicant will be concerned concentrate on basic education. A major new project in Andhra Pradesh has recently been approved and will devote particular attention to enhancing education participation and achievement amongst disadvantaged groups and the development of village level institutions. A gender concern will permeate all project strategies. It is hoped that a similar major project will be initiated in West Bengal by the end of 1996. Further projects in fields such as Adult Literacy are planned.

The Health FMO manages a portfolio of ODA funded projects in the health and population sector concentrating on primary health care, control of major communicable diseases such as malaria, TB and AIDS and rehabilitation of the disabled. Three major projects are concerned with health systems development in the state of Orissa, school health programmes in Andhra Pradesh and malaria control and research in Gujarat.

Duties and responsibilities: The Social Development Advisers will work as full members of the FMO teams which support partner organisations to achieve their objectives. They will: provide specialist social development analysis, advice and management inputs leading to the successful implementation of the programme; focus particularly on the means and methods of project interventions and take-up of health/education services; ensure participation of the poor and women in all aspects of project activities and enable project partners to realise these objectives.

Qualifications and experience: The successful applicant will hold a relevant first degree and a higher degree in relevant social science discipline such as Social Anthropology, Sociology or Social Planning. Several years experience of working overseas is required, preferably in India or South Asia. S/he will be competent in social development planning, gender, community-based participation, poverty reduction, social policy (both posts) and health, population, family welfare (Health FMO post only). Applicants for the Education FMO should preferably have in addition an interest in adult literacy/alternative education.

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Interviews: to be held in Manchester on 13 June 1996.

Post reference: 96/N/005

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Telephone (0161) 957 7383, fax (0161) 957 7897, e-mail mark.hepworth@britcoun.org



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Further details may be obtained from the Director of Personnel, The University of Durham, Old Shire Hall, Durham, DH1 3HP, to whom applications (6 copies) should be submitted, including the names of three referees, by Friday, 7 June 1996. (Candidates outside the British Isles may submit one copy only). Tel: 0191-374 3140; fax: 0191 374 7253; e-mail: (Snr.Recruit@dur.ac.uk).

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GUARDIAN WEEKLY
May 12 1996

Brutal facts lay bare a land of fear

A tyrannical military junta has ruled for 34 years. Now, desperate for hard currency, it seeks to attract holidaymakers. But, writes **John Pilger**, a world of slavery and intimidation lies beyond the tourist trail

AT DAWN, in Burma's ancient capital of Pagan, crows glide without a quiver among the temples in the desert. In Ananda, the most celebrated of the great cathedrals, there are four colossal standing Buddhas. As the light catches one of them, it is smiling. As you get closer the smile becomes enigmatic, then it fades. As you walk to one side and look back, the Buddha's expression is melancholy. Walk on and it becomes fear veiled in pride. For the devout, it symbolises Buddha's timeless wisdom. For me it is the face of modern Burma.

Six years ago, more than 4,000 people lived in Pagan, a city which stands as one of the last wonders of the ancient world. They were given two weeks to leave, some only a few days. The city was being opened to mass tourism and only guides and the staff of a planned strip of hotels were permitted to stay. The people's homes were bulldozed and they were marched at gunpoint to a shadeless, waterless stubble that is a dustbowl in the dry season and runs with mud during the monsoon. Their new houses are made of straw and poor-quality bamboo. Those villagers who objected were sent out on to the barren plain, or beaten, or taken away in the night.

The dispossession was mild by the standards of the dictator Ne Win and the generals who have ruled Burma since a military coup in 1962 crushed the democratically elected government. Last year the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions reported that a million people had been forced from their homes in Rangoon alone, in preparation for tourism and foreign investment. Throughout Burma perhaps 3 million people have been brutally swept up and exiled to "satellite zones" where they are compelled silently to serve Burma's new façade of "economic growth".

A billboard advertising Lucky Strike cigarettes has "Welcome to Yangon" in the space otherwise allotted to a cancer warning. "Yangon" is the name the military regime has given Rangoon; Burma is "Myanmar", which is the equivalent of the German government insisting that the rest of the world call their country Deutschland. A billboard near the airport announces "Visit Myanmar Year 1996". In the next street is the headquarters of Military Intelligence, known to the Burmese as "Em-eye". It is Burma's KGB and, alongside the old tyrant Ne Win and the army, it is the power in the land and the source of what the United Nations special rapporteur has described as "an atmosphere of pervasive fear".

For arriving foreign tourists and businessmen the drive to their hotel inevitably includes a short detour along University Avenue. To the uninitiated, this has a frisson of the forbidden and seditious. Number 54 is the home of the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize winner and leader of the Burmese democracy movement, Aung San Suu Kyi. Here, she spent six years under house arrest until her release last July. Now, every Saturday and Sunday, she is allowed to speak from over her garden gate to several thousand supporters corralled behind barbed wire barriers.

What struck me was the extraordinary courage of the Burmese who came to listen to her — in doing so they branded themselves as opponents of the regime — and the Kafka-like absurdity of the country's elected leader having to address people standing on a platform behind her garden fence.

Since her "unconditional" release, Ms Suu Kyi has been denied freedom of movement. On a recent attempt to leave Rangoon she tried to catch a train to Mandalay, only to find her carriage adrift at the station as the train pulled out. She cannot freely associate with anyone. Those Burmese who pass through her gate take a risk: their names are noted and they can expect a call in the night. Eight members of a dance troupe who had recently celebrated Independence Day with her, "disappeared". They include the popular comedians U Pa Pa Lay and Lu Zaw, who are said to have made a joke about the generals. Each has since been sentenced to seven years' hard labour.

Ms Suu Kyi lived in Britain for many years before she returned to Burma, and her family continue to live in Britain. A few weeks ago her husband, the Oxford Tibetologist Michael Aris, was once again refused permission to visit her. The ban also applies to their two sons, whose Burmese nationality has long been withdrawn. The official newspaper the New Light Of Myanmar attacks her regularly and with mounting viciousness. She is "obsessed by lust and superstition"; she "swings around a bamboo pole brushed with sewage"; she is "drowning in conceit" and "it is pitiable and at once disgusting to see a person [like her] suffering from insanity . . . now at a demented stage". Ms Suu Kyi dismisses all this with a laugh that is brave though difficult to share.

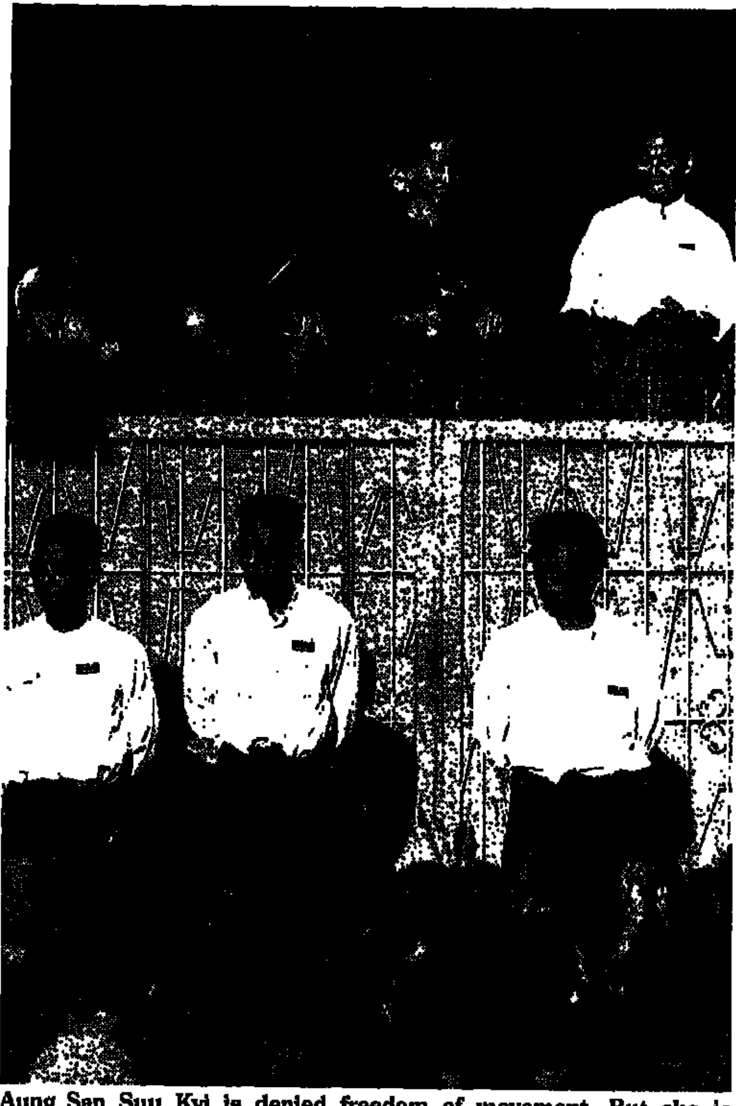
Of course, the reason for such intimidation is her popularity, which could not be greater. At the mention of her name, the contrived neutrality of faces, by which people survive, breaks into smiles. People whisper

'After the people rose up in 1988 and paid the price in blood, we slipped from the headlines'

her name as you brush them in a market, then turn and put a finger to their lips. And if you are able to speak and disclose that you have been to see her, all caution is discarded and questions pour forth as to her wellbeing. But along with expressions of admiration, affection and solidarity are fears for her safety and the recognition that she, and the democracy movement, may be trapped.

"Unless pressure comes from the very governments that the regime is now courting in Asia and the West, nothing will change for a long time," a close friend of hers told me.

Ms Suu Kyi herself told me that foreign investment and tourism were shoring up the power of the junta,



Aung San Suu Kyi is denied freedom of movement. But she is allowed to address her supporters from her garden each weekend

and that the world must realise the scale of Burma's human rights abuses, particularly forced labour. "News comes and goes like fashion," she said. "After the people rose up in 1988 and paid the price in bloodshed, we slipped from the headlines. It will be a pity if we slip again."

In February the United Nations Commission on Human Rights reported, as it does every year, that the following violations were commonplace in Burma: "Torture, summary and arbitrary executions, forced labour, abuse of women, politically motivated arrests and detention, forced displacement, important restrictions on the freedoms of expression and association and oppression of ethnic and religious minorities . . ."

Take at random any of the reports by Amnesty International and what distinguishes the Burmese junta from other modern tyrannies is slave labour. "Conditions in the labour camps," says one study, "are so harsh that hundreds of prisoners have died as a result . . . Military Intelligence personnel regularly interrogate prisoners to the point of unconsciousness. Even the possession of almost any reading material is punishable. Elderly, sick and even handicapped people are placed in leg-irons and forced to work."

Pick up a travel brochure from any of the famous names in British tourism — British Airways, Orient Express, Kuoni — and there is no problem. Indeed, to British Airways Burma offers "the ultimate in luxury" and a "fabulous prize" for its Executive Club members. "To find an unspoilt country today may seem impossible," says the Orient Express brochure, "but Burma is such a place. It has retained its charm, its fascinating traditions . . . its easy-going ways are a tonic to the Western traveller." This "truly unique experience" includes a "free lecture on Burma's history and culture", which makes no mention of the momentous events of 1988.

In 1988, the year before the democracy movement in China was destroyed so publicly in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, the people of Burma rose up and as many as 10,000 were killed by the army. Unlike the Chinese leaders, the generals in Rangoon moved quickly to curtail foreign media coverage. Although there was eye-witness reporting, there were no professional TV cameras and no satellite images to shock the world. Troops had orders to shoot anyone with a camera. On one tape smuggled out of Rangoon, the voices of two amateur Burmese cameramen are caught at the moment they were spotted by soldiers. "What shall we do?" asks one of them. His friend replies, "Keep on filming until they shoot us."

It was in April 1988 that Ms Suu Kyi returned from England to take care of her dying mother. Her father was Aung San, the revered national hero, whose guerrillas were trained by the Japanese, then turned against them during the occupation of the second world war. Having laid the foundations of a democratic state, and negotiated independence from Britain, he was assassinated in 1947. More than 40 years later, his daughter agreed to take on leadership of a renewed democracy movement. It was her demand for the restoration of democracy that led to her house arrest in 1989. However, the generals did hold elections. Having banned canvassing, threatened the electorate and disbarred and silenced Ms Suu Kyi, they were confident they had fragmented her party, the National League for Democracy, and that their own front would gain the largest bloc of seats. The opposite happened. The NLD won 82 per cent of the seats in the new parliament. Stunned, the junta responded by arresting 3,000 NLD workers and handing out prison sentences of up to 25 years to those of the new MPs who tried to establish the government.

The euphemism for oppression was now "economic stability". Having re-invented themselves as the State Law and Order Council, which goes by the fine Orwellian acronym, Slorc, the generals declared Burma "open to free enterprise". At the same time, in order to rebuild the crumbling infrastructure — roads, bridges, airports, railways — they set about turning the country into a vast labour camp. Last year the moat around the imperial palace in Mandalay was excavated and restored almost entirely by forced labour, including chain gangs guarded by troops. When photographic evidence of this was produced, the regime claimed that "contributing labour" was "a noble Burmese tradition" and, anyway, many of the workers were convicted criminals who had "volunteered to work in the open air". In totalitarian Burma the term "convicted criminal" can embrace someone guilty of having been elected to office or of handing out leaflets calling for democracy (five years' hard labour), or of singing a song the generals don't like (seven years' hard labour).

This has thrown up a terrible irony. Alongside the 16,000 British and Allied soldiers who died as slaves on the Japanese "death railway" that linked Burma with Thailand during the second world war, were some 100,000 Burmese and other Asian dead.

Now, history is repeating itself. An extension of this line is being built in Mon state, between the towns of Ye and Tavoy on the Andaman Sea. This is Burma's great secret. Although human rights organisations have documented the testimonies of the slave workers on the new death railway, few outsiders have seen it and the slave camps along the route. This is because much of Mon state is closed to foreigners. It is Burma's gulag.

The towns in this remote part of the country are a step back in time, as if the British Raj were temporarily away at the hill stations. Ancient sewing machines whirred on balconies; the roads were filled with bicycles not cars; carbon paper, radiograms and sleeveless sweaters were for sale. Tavoy has streets of decorous teak houses, the biggest with lace iron balconies. Others are dungeon-like, with iron bars and damp trickling over torn posters of coy women holding parasols.

To talk openly to anyone is to beckon interrogation and worse. Hotels must copy guest registration forms to as many as 14 different authorities. On the day we arrived in Tavoy all "independent travellers" were told they had to leave. Following the line of embankments north into the jungle, we succeeded in getting lost, then by chance came upon a clearing that presented what might have been a tableau of Victorian England. Scores of people were building embankments and a bridge across a dry river bed that is now, with the arrival of the monsoon, an ochre-coloured torrent. From out of jungle so dense that its bamboo and foliage formed great wickerwork screens, they were carving the railway. A 20-foot-high embankment had been built with earth dug by hoe and hand from huge holes. The skilled were paid about 45 cents a

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day. The majority were slave labourers, of whom many were children. Laboriously and clumsily the child workers wrested clay from the excavations, sharing a hoe between three. One little girl in a long blue dress struggled to wield a hoe taller than herself, then fell back exhausted and, with a wince, held her aching shoulder.

The children carried heavy loads of mud mixed with straw in baskets and dishes on their heads and clearly suffered under the weight of it. They poured it into a vat and grinder, turned by two tethered oxen. The sticky clay, now almost as hard as rock, was gathered by two small children, one of them small enough to fit up to his shoulders in a hole directly beneath the grinder. As many as 300 adults and children have been killed or have died from disease and exhaustion, according to one estimate. There were at least 20 other bridges in the vicinity and children were working on all of them.

Every village along the way must give its labour "voluntarily" regardless of age or people's health. Advanced pregnancy is no excuse. If people protest that, as peasant farmers, their labour is all they have to keep them and their families alive, they are fined and their possessions confiscated. If a whole village objects, the head man is beaten or killed and all the houses razed.

"I saw one old man accidentally drop his load into the river," a former civil servant told me in a nearby safe area controlled by the Karen National Union. "As he tried to retrieve it, the soldiers shot him in the head. I could see the water turn red with his blood, then the river carried him away."

A man who escaped with his wife told me: "I saw people dying because of landslides or fever. Some of the bodies were never found, only the head or a foot. They didn't bother to bury the bodies properly, with a funeral. They just dug a hole and left them there."

I asked his wife, Min, if she knew why she was being forced to work in this way. "We were told nothing," she said. "We overheard we were building a railway so that a French oil company could run a pipeline through, and foreigners came to look over the site."

The oil company is Total, which is part-owned by the French government. In partnership with the American Unocal company, Total is building a $1 billion pipeline that will carry Burma's natural gas into Thailand. The deal will give the Rangoon generals about $400 million a year over 30 years. Since they put an end to democracy in 1990, it is estimated that the Slorc have received 65 per cent of their financial backing from foreign oil companies, including Britain's Premier Oil.

In its 1993 report on human rights abuses throughout the world, the US State Department says the Slorc "routinely" uses slave labour and "will use the new railway to transport soldiers and construction supplies into the pipeline area". Unocal says reports of slave labour are a "fabrication" and both the oil companies deny the railway is linked to the pipeline project.

In 1993 the British trade minister, Richard Needham, told Parliament, "The Government's policy is to provide no specific encouragement to British firms to trade or invest in Burma in view of the current political and economic situation there." In the same breath he said, "British business visitors to Rangoon can of course look to our embassy there for advice and support." Last year most veils had dropped. The Department of Trade funded a seminar in London called An Introduction To Burma — The Latest Tiger Cub? The organiser was Peter Godwin, a merchant banker and government adviser on trade in Southeast Asia. "To be a Briton in Burma," he told the delegates, "is a privilege." Godwin said he had been assured by the senior general in the Slorc "openly and categorically" that Burma's "socialism" had been "a mistake" and that this mistake had caused the upheavals in 1988. He made no reference to the generals murdering thousands of unarmed civilians, then throwing most of the elected government into prison. The "good news", he said, "is that economic growth is picking up".

A few Western businessmen operating in Burma claim that foreign investment in the country has multiplied tenfold since 1992. "It's not so much a gradual pick-up," said Pat James, a Texan entrepreneur, "as a skyrocket." This is disputed by, among others, a recent report in The Economist. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have yet to lend the generals a penny. However, what has begun in Burma is a familiar process in which a dictatorship's crimes against its people are obscured and "forgotten" as foreign businessmen seek to justify what the East Asian governments call "positive engagement" and the Europeans and Australians call "critical dialogue". The prize is a cheap labour colony that promises to undercut even China and Vietnam.

In spite of a certain sound and fury aimed at the regime by Madeline Albright, the US Representative at the UN, US policy is "not to encourage or discourage" business with Burma. The EU countries have followed a similar two-faced policy. While most Western aid remains suspended, the Japanese government gives $48.7 million a year and the great *zaibatsu* — Mitsui, Mitsubishi, Honda and Nippon Steel — have offices in Rangoon.

Burma's most profitable export is illegal. More than half the heroin reaching the streets of American and Australian cities originates in the "golden triangle" where the borders of Burma, Laos and Thailand meet. Under the Slorc, heroin production has doubled. Two researchers, Dr Chris Beyrer and Faith Doherty, conclude from a long investigation for the South-East Asian Information Network that the Slorc have allowed heroin to circulate freely and cheaply in Burma in the hope that it "pacifies" the rebellious young.

Ms Suu Kyi was two years old when her father was murdered. What distinguished the movement

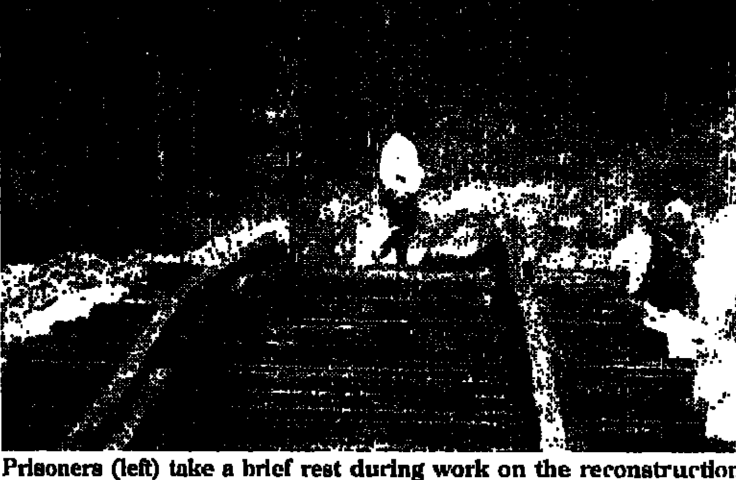
Few outsiders have seen the slave camps, as much of Mon state is closed to foreigners. It is Burma's gulag

he founded was its complex attempt to apply a blend of Buddhism, socialism and democracy to the freely elected governments that followed. But this flowering coincided with a period of turmoil as the ethnic peoples demanded autonomy. In March 1962 the army stepped in and seized power. Its leader, Ne Win, became Burma's Stalin. He displaced whole populations, built labour camps and filled the prisons with his enemies, real and imagined. His wars against the ethnic peoples were unrelenting and vengeful. He abolished Burma's lively free press; and along the way he made himself extremely rich.

In 1987 the man who called himself "Brilliant as the Sun" produced his *coup de grâce*. Without warning, he withdrew most of the country's banknotes, replacing them with new denominations that included or added up to the number nine. According to his chief astrologer, nine was his lucky number. The people of Burma did not share his luck. As most of them kept their savings in cash, most were ruined.

In a nation now impoverished the touchpaper was lit. By March 1988 the regime was at war with the students at Rangoon university. The moment of uprising came precisely at eight minutes past eight on the





Prisoners (left) take a brief rest during work on the reconstruction of Mandalay Palace, set to become a tourist attraction. Children are forced to work on Burma's new death railway under harsh conditions

morning of the eighth month of 1988. This was the auspicious time the dockworkers, the "first wave", chose to strike. Other workers followed in succession; and in subsequent days and weeks almost everyone in the cities and towns, it seemed, showed a courage equal to those who stormed the Berlin Wall the following year. Without guns, ordinary people began to reclaim their country.

Then the slaughter began. The army fired point blank at the crowds and bayoneted those who fell. In Thailand and Norway, I have interviewed the exiled witnesses to these epic events, most of them speaking publicly for the first time. "One of my friends was shot in the head right there, in front of me," said Ko Htun Oo, a former student. "Two girls and a monk were shot next to him." Another student, Aye Chan, said, "A lot of flame was coming out of the crematorium which was surrounded by troops. They weren't even identifying bodies, so the parents would never know. The dead and wounded were all mixed up. They just burned them alive."

Now well into his eighties, Ne Win remains the centre of the Slorc's power. His former aide, the secret police chief, General Khin Nyunt, is "Secretary One". Behind sunglasses Gen Khin Nyunt's pudgy face appears at least five times a day in the New Light of Myanmar.

The taxi dropped us far from the long green fence of number 54 University Avenue. The house is a stately pile fallen on hard times, overlooking a garden that tumbles down to Inya Lake and to a trip-wire, a reminder that this was one woman's prison.

Ms Suu Kyi is a striking, glamorous figure who looks much younger than her 50 years and appears at first to carry her suffering lightly. Only in repose does her face offer a glimpse of the cost and the grit that has seen her through, though when she laughs this vanishes, like a blind closed and open.

I asked her if her release from house arrest was a cynical exercise by the regime to give itself a human face. "I think they also miscalculated," she replied, "that the National League For Democracy was a spent force and that releasing me was not going to make any difference . . ."

"But with such a brute force confronting you, how do you reclaim the power you won at the ballot box?"

"We are not the first people to face this dilemma. In Buddhism we are taught the four basic ingredients for success: first, you must have the will to want it; then you must have the right kind of attitude; then you must have the perseverance, then wisdom . . ."

I said that the British Foreign Office minister, Jeremy Hanley, had told Parliament that "through commercial contacts with democratic nations such as Britain, the Burmese people will gain experience of democratic principles".

She laughed. "Not in the least bit, because the so-called market economy is only open to some. Investors will help only a small élite to get richer and richer. This works against the very idea of democracy because the gap between rich and poor is growing all the time. The same applies to tourism. They should stay away until we are a democracy. Look at the forced labour that is going on all over the country. A lot of it is aimed at the tourist trade. It's very painful. Roads and bridges are built at the expense of the people. If you cannot provide one labourer you are fined. If you cannot afford the fine, the children are forced to labour."

During the first years of her house arrest soldiers were ordered to lie with their ears to the ground so as to detect her "tunnelling" to the house next door. They failed to grasp that she had no intention of escaping, or seeking exile. In the outside world, her name became a byword; and people would pass her house just to be reassured by the sound of her playing her piano.

"Will Burma be free in the foreseeable future?"

"Yes!" she replied unhesitatingly.

"That's not just a dream?"

"No, I calculate it from the will of the people and the current of world opinion . . . I knew I'd be free . . . some day."

Desmond Tutu — like Ms Suu Kyi, a Nobel Peace Prize winner — said recently: "International pressure can change the situation in Burma. Tough sanctions, not constructive engagement, finally brought about a new South Africa. This is the only language that tyrants understand."

What is hopeful is that there is the promise of sanctions in a remarkable disinvestment campaign already well under way in the US. Based on the boycott of apartheid South Africa, selective purchasing laws have been enacted by a growing number of US cities, including San Francisco. These make illegal municipal contracts with companies that trade with or invest in Burma.

A Massachusetts Representative, Byron Rushing, who has written a selective purchasing law for his own state, told me: "In the case of South Africa, we were able to put pressure on a whole range of companies, like General Motors, Coca-Cola, Pepsi Cola, and most eventually withdrew. And that really added to the pressure on the white government. That was a victory. As for Burma, it's not going to happen overnight, but we have started. The civilised world should follow."

Barred nature

Paul Evans

IT WAS a beautiful spring morning in London. Disgorged from the underground station at Victoria, blinking in the unaccustomed sunlight, I made it across the road, drawn by huge London plane trees in a park. The boughs of these trees, all chalk and beige camouflage, are so startlingly clear of grime because they exfoliate and remain fresh.

New leaves and little green female baubles were pushing out next to the brown spiky grenades of last autumn's seed heads which scatter seeds in spring. London planes are a hybrid between oriental and American species, forest grown in Spain and planted in England in 1650. They are perfectly at home in London's urban forest and reflect its cosmopolitan nature. The park was closed.

I wandered north and stumbled into a very strange world. Belgravia is an exclusive ghetto of the ultra-affluent. The spotless streets in front of elegant white and cream colonnaded Georgian houses surround garden squares. These gardens are meticulously kept, not a weed in sight. No litter, no flocks of pigeons — in fact no avian, floral or human ragamuffins. The policemen carry guns.

I was drawn to the gardens by more stately plane trees, breezy white flowering cherries and crab-apples and sweet scented barberry from Japan and China. The bronzy leaves and blossom of snowy mespil (Amelanchier) or shadblow as it is called in America, reminded me of springtime in the Appalachians. But the gardens in the squares had iron railings and locked gates. The gardens were deserted. On such a beautiful day, there was not a soul in sight.

I had been thinking about trees and health and about the way we project our values, attitudes and concepts on to trees to make them mean what we want them to mean, instead of appreciating them for what they are. And here the super-rich see them as treasures to be locked away.

I've always thought that an appreciation of trees encouraged a generosity of spirit. Not here. Forced to prowl round the outside of the garden squares where the very expensive cars were parked, my mood darkened. What would happen if I jumped the fence? Would seeds shower from my clothes? Are the rich afraid that if people like me were allowed in there would be sycamore seedlings in the lawns, brambles in the flower-beds, Japanese knotweed in the shrubberies?

Back in the vulgar, vernacular landscapes of home, where I can roam with impunity, I am met by a plant that is the antithesis of the Belgravia squares — the dandelion. Dandelions burst into spring with an indolent brilliance. They have a rude and irrepressible beauty. The bane of tidy gardeners and landscape architects, they spangle grass verges, irreverently jostling carefully planted daffodils. Famed for their diuretic properties, medieval apothecaries called them *dens leonis*, the lion's tooth because of either the shape of the tap-root, the florets or jagged leaves. By the 15th century, the French *dent de lion* became *dawndelyoun*.

Because of the twin British traditions — gardens and colonialism — the dandelion spread throughout the world as an impudent free-loader, establishing as a weed and a curse to lawns everywhere. "The sun never sets on the empire of the dandelion," wrote Alfred Crosby. Everywhere except the highly manicured garden squares of Belgravia it seems. If it was rare and expensive, I wonder if the glorious golden "piss-a-bed" would be locked up?

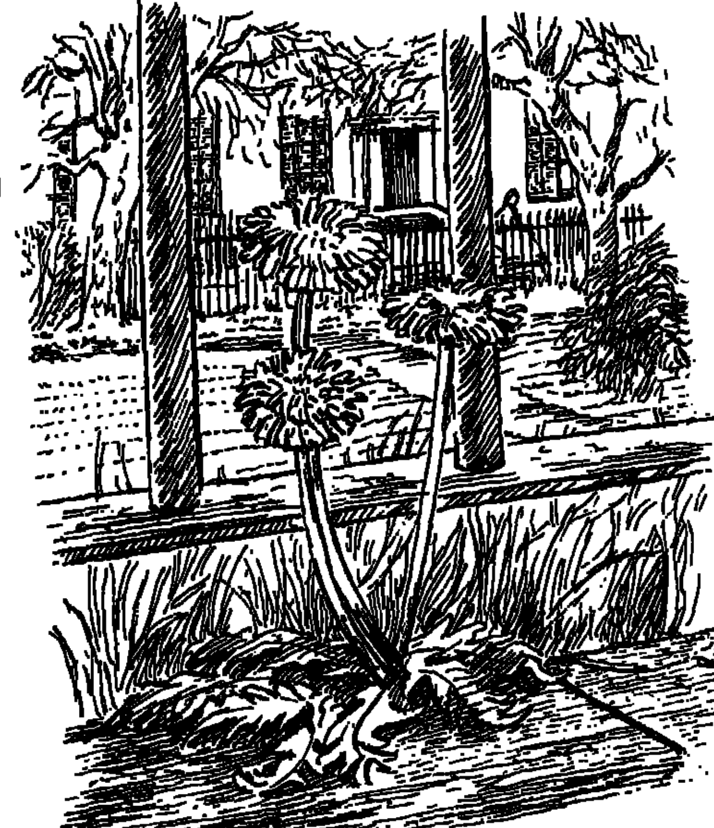


ILLUSTRATION: BARRY LARKING

Chess Leonard Barden

RUTH SHELDON is surely the UK's chess player of the month. The Manchester 15-year-old's recent results include first prize at Stockport, a win over England's No 4 grandmaster, and third place at Newcastle, where she narrowly missed the IM norm.

Sheldon's rapid advance augurs well for this year's team olympiad in Armenia, where the England men will be the top-seeded western squad and the women players are now also in a position from which to compete for medals.

The Leigh Congress Prixette, mandatory women's boards in the UK League and Varsity match, and master coaching for girls have all contributed to rising standards.

More could be done, however; for example, it is long overdue for women's boards to be included in the final stages of the BCF's inter-county and inter-club knockouts.

Ruth Sheldon-GM John Nunn, King's Indian Defence

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d6 5 Be2 0-0 6 Nf3 e5 7 d5 a5 8 Be3 Ng4 9 Bg5 f6 10 Bh4 Na6 11 Nd2 Nh6 12 0-0 Qe8 13 a3 Bd7 14 b3 f5 15 f3 Nf7 16 Rb1 Bh6 17 Bf2 Nc5 18 b4 axb4 19 axb4 Na4 20 Qc2

It's a familiar strategy so far in this opening, where White has more space while Black snipes on the flanks.

Qe7? Nxc3 21 Qxc3 Qe7 with Ra2 and Qg5 counterplay is better.

21 Nb5! Rfc8 22 Ra1 The a4 knight is out on a limb, and by the time it regains safety Black's game is collapsing.

Bxd2 23 Qxd2 fxe4 24 fxe4 Qg5 25 Be3 Qh4 26 Qc2 Bxb5 27 cxb5 Nb6 28 Rxa8 Nxa8 29 b6! More scope for White's bishops. **Ng5 30 Bd3 Qg4 31 bxc7 Nxc7 32 Kh1 Nb5** Losing a piece, but if Nf7 33 Rc1 and Black can't escape the pin.

33 Qf2 Nc7 34 Be2 Qxe4 35 Bxg5 Qxd5 36 Bh6 Resigns. White mates by 37 Qf8+ or by Ne6 37 Qf7+.

Sutton's Easter congress always attracts hundreds of players. This was the game that decided first prize.

GM Julian Hodgson-GM Keith Arkell, French Defence

1 d4 e6 2 e4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 c3 Nc6 5 Nf3 Qb6 6 a3 c4 7 Nbd2 Na5 8 h4 Bd7 9 h5 0-0-0 10 g3 f5 11 exf6? Better to keep the centre closed, and to regroup by Ng1-h3-f4.

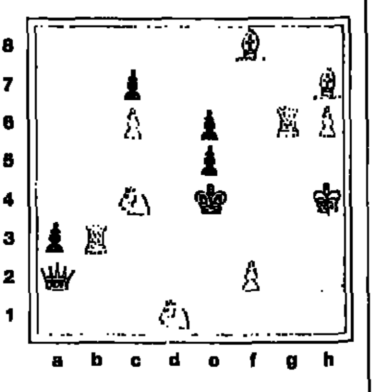
gxf6 12 Bh3 Bd6 13 0-0 e5 14 Bxd7+ Rxd7 15 Rb1 e4 16 Nh4 Ne7 17 b3 Qc7 18 bxc4 e3! 19 fxe3 Bxg3 20 Ng2 Rg8 21 Qe2 Nec6 22 cxd5 Rdg7! 23 Nf3 Qf7? Missing Qd7! 24 dxc6 Qh3 25 cxb7+ Kb8 26 Rb2 Rg5! 27 Rd1 Rxh5 28 Kf1 Qh1+ 29 Ng1 Rf5+ 30 Nf4 Bxf4 31 Ke1 Rxg1+ 32 Kd2 Rxd1+ 33 Qxd1 Bxe3+ 34 Kc2 Qe4+ 35 Qd3 Rf2+ and wins.

24 dxc6 Qxh5 25 cxb7+ Kb8 26 Rb2 Qh3 27 e4 Rg4 28 e5? 28 d5! f5 29 Be3 is unclear.

fxe5 29 dxe5 Nc4 30 Rc2 Rh4! A fine finish to an imaginative attack.

31 Ngxh4 Bf2+! 32 Kxf2 Qg3 mate.

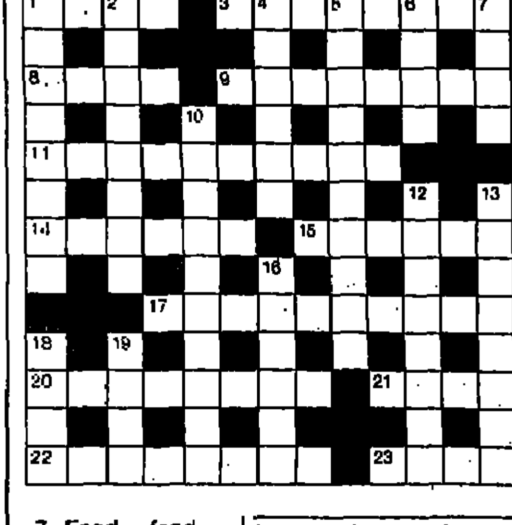
No 2420



White mates in two moves, against any defence (by Charles Planck). Black has only king moves, but White is spoilt for choice.

No 2419: 1 Ba8. If e6 2 Kb7 Kd5 3 Kb6 mate. If exd6 2 Nf6 dxe5 (d5 3 Nd7) 3 Ne4.

Quick crossword no. 313



Across

1 Muddle — soldiers' canteen (4)
3 Sword holder (8)
8 Cut short (4)
9 Thin, crisp biscuits — mad! (8)
11 Ragged, dirty child (10)
14 Frankly (6)
15 Disregard (6)
17 Indian Ocean republic (10)
20 New Year's Eve (8)
21 Fortune (4)
22 Comic verse — drivel (8)
23 Intend (4)

Down

1 Sweet biscuit (8)
2 Acute viral disease (8)
4 Glass water bottle (6)
5 & 16 British monarch's residence (10,6)
6 Elderly (4)
7 Food — food container (4)
10 Combine (10)
12 Decide — to end (8)
13 Busby (8)
16 (see 5)
18 Provided with shoes (4)
19 Eager (4)

Last week's solution

■MISSENGLAND■
L■M■T■O■E■U■L
OPPORTUNE■RIO
O■■■O■G■C■S■V
KIOSK■ACHIEVE
F■B■E■T■■■M■F
OVERDO■ALKALI
R■D■■■A■O■I■F
WAITING■CADET
O■E■N■E■A■■■E
RUN■CONSTABLE
K■C■U■D■E■E■N
■MERRYANDREW■

Bridge Zia Mahmood

ALCOHOL and serious bridge don't mix. But after today's hand, from the Vanderbilt Cup, South thought that he deserved a congratulatory brandy. See if you agree with him. Not vulnerable against vulnerable opponents, his hand was:

♠AKQ986 ♥42 ♦KQ1053 ♣None

East opened one club, and South chose the pressure bid of four spades. West studied his hand for a while, then jumped to six clubs, but North competed with six spades. East doubled to end a brief but brutal auction. The full deal was:

North
♠ J 10 5 4
♥ 8 5
♦ J 9 8 7 6
♣ 7 4

West
♠ 3
♥ Q J 10 6 3
♦ A 4
♣ K Q 8 6 2

East
♠ 7 2
♥ A K 9 7
♦ 2
♣ A J 10 9 5 3

South
♠ A K Q 9 8 6
♥ 4 2
♦ K Q 10 5 3
♣ None

South	West	North	East
			1♣
4♠	6♣	6♠	Dble
No	No	No.	

The defenders did well to take a diamond ruff in addition to the ace and king of hearts and the ace of diamonds, but North-South were pleased with their efforts, for they had conceded just 500 points on a deal where their opponents could make a vulnerable six clubs.

If someone had told South that his team was going to lose 19 IMPs on this board, perhaps his cognac would not have tasted so fine! The auction at the other table was not brief:

South	West	North	East
			1♣
1♠	2♥	3♠	4♥
4♠	5♣	No	No
5♦	5♥	5♠	6♣
No	No	6♦	6♥
6♠	No	No	7♣
No	No	7♠	No
No	7NT	No	No
Dble	No	No	No

The early rounds of bidding were reasonable enough. North's three spades was a pre-emptive raise of his partner's simple overcall. East passed five clubs for fear of two spade losers, but when North-South went to five spades East gambled that his partner had a singleton in that suit and contested further with six clubs.

His bid of seven clubs is harder to explain, though sometimes when each side has a massive fit in two suits both can make 12 tricks, so East decided to take insurance. No doubt for the same reasons, North battled on with seven spades. At this point East really ought to have doubled, but when he passed, West thought he was being invited to bid 7NT.

In the heat of battle, both seemed to forget that a short while ago they had been prepared to settle for five clubs!

South happily doubled 7NT and North led a spade, so the penalty was 1,700 points.

The player who had been South at the other table choked on his drink when he heard this result, but to his credit he said nothing, and was rewarded when his team hung on to win the match.

That, of course, called for another brandy — and this time it really did taste sweet! ©

Profit motive robs China's heritage

Andrew Higgins

NEXT TO a muddy river marking the Hong Kong border, a locked concrete strongroom holds victims of the chaos creeping across China: a decapitated stone Buddha, seven Ming dynasty tablets, dozens of broken Tang horses, 11 plundered dinosaur eggs.

Part of a huge cargo of cultural contraband, they had arrived at the Lok Mak Chau border post in the middle of the night, concealed in the back of a lorry.

"The driver was very nervous and avoided looking anyone in the eye," said Kwok Sinchik, head of customs at the busiest crossing point between Hong Kong and the Chinese town of Shenzhen. Had the driver not been so edgy, his wares would now be sitting in the antique shops along Hollywood Road, the centre of Hong Kong's flourishing business in smuggled Chinese antiquities, and private collections in London, Tokyo or New York.

Instead, the driver led police to a car park at a Hong Kong industrial estate where five people were waiting to take delivery of his plunder, collected from across China. He and the leader of the gang were arrested.

The 1,183 antiques confiscated in March at Lok Mak Chau and now under lock and key awaiting return to China represent the biggest single seizure of smuggled Chinese relics by Hong Kong customs. Another haul only a week before had recovered 748 items. Together, the confiscated objects nearly equal the total number of Chinese antiques seized in the whole of 1994 and 1995.

The surge of confiscations — only a tiny fraction of the total volume of smuggled wares — suggests a sharp increase in an illicit trade fed by tomb and temple thieves, triads and corrupt Chinese officials. Further evidence of the flood is the deflating prices in Hollywood Road.

"Getting a Tang dynasty horse even in wretched condition used to be quite exciting," said Loong Meeseen of Sotheby's in Hong Kong. "Now they are everywhere."

The brazen looting of Chinese artefacts, which now make up a significant part of a worldwide trade worth an estimated $1 billion a year, threatens political as well as cultural menace. For centuries, mandarins have regarded grave-robbing as a sign of disorder.

Today, the treasure-laden burial mounds of former imperial capitals such as Luoyang and Xi'an are the point of departure for many of the goods that flood, mostly undetected, into Hong Kong aboard lorries and boats. The profit motive has so eroded restraint that a thief even managed to steal the severed head of a terracotta warrior from Xi'an's greatest cultural treasure, the buried mock army of Qin Shi Huangdi, the first emperor of unified China.

China's economic boom has not only unleashed rampant greed, but it has also produced a building blitz that has uncovered thousands of ancient tombs. Construction of a highway in Hubei province unearthed 1,600 graves up to 2,700 years old.

In a desperate attempt to staunch the flow, China routinely executes smugglers. Hong Kong imposes no restrictions on the trade in antiques, stolen or otherwise, other than a demand that all goods entering the territory be listed on an official manifest — a requirement never met as it would bring certain arrest.



Hong Kong's antique shops are full of Chinese plunder PHOTO: DON McPHEE

Letter from Kyoto Jane Norman

Wedding precision

ASAKO got married on the day the Buddha died. In Japanese the word for "Buddha" and the word for "thing" sound the same but are written differently, and in determining a nickname for the day in the week when everything was most likely to go wrong the ancient astrologers managed to confuse this point. The Buddha therefore dies once a week; and since few Japanese couples are prepared to risk such an ill-omened start to married life most hotels offer a special deal on that day to try to boost bookings.

The venue for Asako's wedding was the Grand Hotel. Not only was the Grand giving the "A" range of food, flowers, place settings and so on at the "B" rate; but the bridal costume division was renting out three changes of outfit — a padded crimson kimono, a gleaming white kimono, and a wedding dress floating in layers of tulle — for the price of two. The *pièce de résistance* was the magnificent, three-tier wedding cake on a silver stand, the "A" cake at a knock-down price. The bride and groom cut the cake together to clapping and the clicking of cameras. It turned out, however, that the cake was not for eating, being made of plastic with a soft spot for the knife, to be washed and used again.

We ate lunch at a leisurely pace but on the particularly auspicious day of great peace it takes split-second timing with a strict maximum of three hours per wedding to keep all the parties moving along without getting them mixed up.

The day was Asako's choice. Her father was not happy about it because, superstition aside, he didn't want all the relations, especially on the groom's side, to think he was a skinflint. He gave in because Asako's elder sister, less down to earth, had insisted on a full Catholic wedding ceremony. The Christian style of nuptials, with all the vows and hymns and Mendelssohn, is fashionable these days and Asako's sister, who had a hazy notion that when it came to Christianity Catholics were stricter about fidelity than the others, thought she may as well go the whole hog.

Asako's sister's husband, a computer salesman, ran off with a career woman from a rival company shortly after the wedding; and Asako's father, a poorer and a wiser man, was in many ways relieved that his younger daughter wanted to keep things simple.

Simple or not, a daunting array of relations had been mustered on both sides, everybody over a certain age in black. I wondered what they would do for a funeral. A woman at my table pointed out the men's white ties and the women's brocade sashes. At a funeral the ties and the sashes would be black too.

Pride of place was given to the matchmaker, who was the president of Asako's father's company. I happened to know that he had never till this day set eyes on either Asako or the groom but a Japanese wedding requires a suitably mellow and distinguished person to fill the matchmaker's chair. The real catalyst, the wife of Asako's mother's calligraphy teacher, who was friendly with the aunt of an unattached civil engineer, preferred to keep a low profile.

ASAKO was 28, worked in a bank, and lived with her parents. Under the circumstances she agreed to have a look at the civil engineer. The first meeting was followed by a private conversation in a coffee shop; and the relationship was cemented with a visit to a temple garden to view the autumn leaves. The only discordant note in a very sensible love story was struck when Asako forgot her husband's name during her speech, calling him Hiroshi instead of Satoshi.

It seemed unlikely that their honeymoon would be the time for bride and groom to get to know each other any better. In the space of 10 days they were due to visit Rome, Venice, Paris, London, the Jungfrau and the Castle of Neuschwanstein.

Asako spent most of her wedding out of sight, being draped in the next number by the Grand Hotel's resident dresser. At each appearance there was just time to pose for photographs before she had to rush back to change. Her face was powdered white, her lips were a pursed red dot, and on her head sat a wig of oiled, shining hair. The idea seems to be to blot any trace of a bride's individuality; and if Asako had caught a cold and been replaced by a stand-in none of us would have been any the wiser.

Notes & Queries Joseph Harker

DID people ever use the word "gruntled" to describe a happy person?

I PERSONALLY have always hoped to be both "kempt" and "shevelled" on the same day. — *Mary Phillips-Rickey, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada*

WHICH animal can tolerate the greatest temperature range?

TARDIGRADES or water bear animalcules must be among the animals with tolerance to the greatest temperature range. They can be both frozen in liquid nitrogen and boiled under pressure. Aside from this they are also resistant to a variety of corrosive chemicals and can revive after almost complete dessication. They survive such extremes by entering a state of suspended animation which they can hold for at least a century. — *A Leask, Sydney, Australia*

MICRO-ORGANISMS such as thermophilic bacteria can survive the extreme temperatures of boiling water (100C) and freezing in liquid nitrogen (-196C). Their survival is successively reduced in multicellular organisms. However, I was told of an experiment where a cockroach frozen in liquid nitrogen walked away once it thawed at room temperature. In a tropical region, I inadvertently "cooked" a cockroach for three minutes at full power in an 800-watt microwave oven. On opening the door, the cockroach, albeit groggy, crawled out. — *Rohan de Silva, London*

A GOVERNMENT with a majority in both Houses of Parliament and acquiescent civil servants announces at the end of its five-year term that it is going to stay in office, and not call a general election. It would then have no legality, but how would it be ousted from office?

GIVEN that Britain does not have a written constitution and that, for all practical purposes, the sovereignty of Parliament is limited only by Acts and Treaties which Parliament itself can abrogate or alter, there is no constitutional check on Parliament's extending its term. In fact Parliament did precisely this in 1716. In 1694 a Triennial Act was passed requiring elections to be held at least once every three years, establishing formal terms for Parliament for the first time. Following the election of 1715, Parliament repealed the Triennial Act and replaced it with a Septennial Act requiring elections only once every seven years. As a result, this parliament sat until the general election of 1722. There is no constitutional bar on a modern parliament's similarly prolonging itself. — *Professor David Eastwood, University of Wales, Swansea*

Any answers?

HOW do the French decide the gender of English words adopted into their language? — *Tim C Bedwick, Saltburn, Cleveland*

IS THERE any evidence that the gravitational pull of the moon and/or its brightness affect human, animal or plant behaviour or any other agricultural phenomenon? — *Jane Sherman, Rome*

DOES the European Flag have a nickname, in the same way as the Stars and Stripes or the Union Jack? — *S L Perrott, London*

Answers should be e-mailed to weekly@guardian.co.uk, faxed to 0171/44171-242-0985, or posted to The Guardian Weekly, 75 Farringdon Road, London EC1M 3HQ

A Country Diary

John Vallins

AUSTRALIA: Wilson's Promontory ("the Prom") is the southernmost tip of the Australian mainland, 130 miles south-east of Melbourne. Its rocks and mountains were formed 400 million years ago and once stretched between Victoria and Tasmania. When the climate warmed and sea levels rose, the land-link was cut.

It is now a nature reserve of 49,000 hectares, with ocean on three sides, and as timeless a space as you would hope to find. The wide, sandy bed of the tidal river winds out to Norman Bay. On either bank stand mysterious, rounded boulders, smoothed and streaked by the action of the elements. It would be hard to miss the sense of Aboriginal presence here. There is archaeological evidence and myths. Names like those of "Looern" and "Tiddalik" survive. The slopes and mountains are covered with vegetation where kookaburras, spectacular crimson rosellas and lorikeets perch in the Coast Tea-Trees. There are still, silent wetlands where white egrets and white-faced herons search for food. Towards dusk we drove along the road to the small town of Foster. A plaque beside the stream commemorates the six men who first found gold there. On the way, we saw a large mother wombat closely followed by her young. She peered at us but then continued calmly munching spiky grass while the young one hid behind her and occasionally peered around. A single kangaroo bounced across the road. Then whole groups and families came out in the cool of the evening, some browsing on all fours and here and there, an adult moving easily in giant leaps towards greener grass.

Brothers on a roll

MUSIC
Caroline Sullivan

WHAT Oasis did next: played to 78,000 people at the Manchester City football ground. The two shows, which sold out in an hour, were ostensibly to thank fans for making them the biggest British band of the last 10 years, but there was doubtless an ulterior motive. It would not be beneath Noel and Our Kid Gallagher to play their beloved team's stadium just for the pleasure of refusing entry to United players.

But if Ryan Giggs had turned up, he would have been just another body in the celebrity crush backstage. Patsy Kensit and a shoal of soap stars headed the guest list, which raises one of the most perplexing Oasis questions. Why are the rich and beautiful so eager to hob-nob with the strikingly ordinary Gallagher brothers? Answer that and you'd have the key to the Oasis phenomenon.

The music, loutishly marvellous as it is, can't be the whole reason that T-shirts were selling at a rate of 20 per minute. Nor can it be their dress sense. It is probably not even Noel's admission to having been a teenage burglar.

Rather, Oasis's secret recipe seems a combination of all the above, plus a meat-eating, maiden-ravishing virility that inspires girls to go semi-naked on cold spring nights.

Maine Road is their promotion to the stadium band élite. The 120 personnel involved in the show — caterers to third violinist — made their days of playing cubbyholes seem far more remote than just two years ago.

Yet the payroll belied the simplicity of the show, which was essentially five men banging guitars before a black and white logo backdrop. The brief appearances of string and brass sections aside, the Oases used none of the special effects deemed *de rigueur* for stadiums. This took guts, as they aren't dynamic performers. Liam's stage manner, which once consisted of a "You lookin' at me, poonk?" scowl, now extends to ambling around in sleepy incomprehension — and he's the frontman.

That it would be great, however, was predestined. Take 15 bumptious tunes familiar from incessant radio play, add Oasis's arrogance and the drama of a stadium at sunset and it couldn't not feel like one of the gigs of the year. When Liam sang "I feel supersonic", you believed him. Anyone would feel supersonic if 38,000 people were echoing every word of his every song.

Unexpectedly, the apex wasn't Wonderwall, the ballad that helped their Morning Glory album sell 8 million copies. Although the brothers did it as an atypical duet, it was surpassed by Roll With It. Deservedly so, too, because for brainless exhilaration it is unmatched by any other pop song this decade. It was conceived for terraces, and as the chorus of "You got to say what you say, don't let anybody stand in your way" rolled into the night sky. It would be tragic if Oasis ever decided to make a concept album. They could never be better than they are now.

The Saint and the sinners

CINEMA
Derek Malcolm

IF YOUR brain or tongue can get round **Things To Do In Denver When You're Dead**, the title of Gary Feldman's debut feature is a bit of a come-on. And so, it turns out, is the film, which is a thriller that achieves more or less what it sets out to do with a feline grace and a sense of irony that puts it somewhere near the class of Pulp Fiction and The Usual Suspects.

Not that it is really like either. It hasn't got the Tarantino film's sense of postmodern moral blankness nor the super-clever intricacy of the Bryan Singer film. But it works, and that's all that matters.

It starts like something out of a pulp fantasy: former gangster Jimmy The Saint (Andy Garcia) takes us through his Afterlife Advice Service, which records the final thoughts of his dying clients for their Denver families.

Efficient as it is, it is not doing well, and when he is summoned by The Man With A Plan (Christopher Walken in a wheelchair) to frighten away an unsuitably dim boyfriend from his beloved daughter, he feels bound to take his chances.

He collects a posse of his former colleagues, one of whom is a projectionist in a downtown porno house (Christopher Lloyd) and another a punch-drunk boxer who uses dead bodies as punch-bags in the mortuary he looks after (Treat Williams).

They, of course, are only capable of frightening each other, and end up botching the job by killing both of their prey. That means hitman extraordinaire Mr Shrrr (Steve Buscemi) is sent after the lot of them, and it's not going to be a pretty sight since The Man With A Plan is impatient with failure.

With a cast like this and a sharply funny screenplay by Scott Rosenberg, Denver is rather more than a set of good performances — all the better, Walken apart, for being cast largely against type.

Fleder not only uses Denver intelligently — a location that's fresher than LA or New York — but also infuses the film with the kind of warmth and feeling some of the old westerns had when dealing with human dinosaurs trying to make it within a context that's no longer there. It could have been a difficult mix, but it comes off triumphantly.

David Hogan is a music video alumnus, and you'd guess that straightaway as the Baywatch babe goes into a sinuous, chest-revealing night-club routine that ends with her taking off a shoe and throwing it heel-first into the throat of a motormouth in the front row. Tat for tit, as it were.

That, however, is the best part of **Barb Wire**. What follows is an incomprehensibly plotted thriller set in a future which, if it comes about, would make gazing at Ms PA Lee the only possible pleasure. Dressed to kill as tightly as leather allows and literally doing so with monotonous regularity, she is asked to mouth dialogue — including the film's tagline "Don't call me babe" — that would make Charlton Heston as Moses grimace.

"Come to see Twin Peaks with implants then?" said the doorman at the preview theatre. I'm afraid he was more or less right.

Bronze age . . . Jasper Johns takes commonplace objects for his sculptures to produce exhilarating works of pure art

It's all in the can

ART
Carl Freedman

THERE'S something quite magical about Jasper Johns's sculpture show at the Leeds City Art Gallery (until June 30). The sculptures, collected here for the first time by themselves, are from a seminal period in Johns's career, 1958-65. It's a small and unassuming exhibition, tucked away in a single gallery space. For such a centrally important 20th century artist, it comes as a relief to be able to see and experience his work without stampeding hordes. Particularly as Johns's art is fundamentally contemplative, requiring time in order to fully experience its effect.

Johns chooses objects for his sculptures which were commonplace, impersonal and mass-produced, such as beer cans, light bulbs and an ordinary flashlight. Cast in bronze or modelled in plaster or Sculpmetal (a clay-like medium with a metallic finish) they are made in such a way that they generate a deep ambiguity concerning their status. Are they artistic representations or are they just replications of the original object?

Painted Bronze (1960) is two Ballantine Ale cans cast in bronze, complete with painted labels. Superficially it looks real, yet the surface and edges of the cans are slightly uneven, the lettering too free and schematic. It sits there, quietly humming with its perpetual oscillation between reality and illusion.

The more you look at his sculptures the more the different levels of conceptual and perceptual reality go into a kind of vertiginous spin. The result is an exhilarating big-dipper ride for the mind, where certainty is constantly lost and recovered, and ends with the conviction that what Johns has done is to reveal an essence of pure art.

Some of the sculptures lack this brilliant crystallisation and are more like surrealist visual puns. But this show successfully answers its own question "What is art?" Essential viewing.

The universal challenge of being heroic in tight trousers

TELEVISION
Nancy Banks-Smith

SHARPE (ITV), that thorn in Napoleon and the BBC's side, is back and a-rollicking we will go. When Sean Bean gets an award for rollicking, I hope he remembers to thank his parents for his elegant legs and entertaining name. If Cleopatra's nose had been an inch longer, the history of the world would have changed. If Bean's legs had been six inches shorter, we'd have lost Waterloo. As it is, he looks tremendously heroic in tight trousers and a rivulet of silver buttons. He even looks fairly heroic in a tam-o'-shanter with a pompom.

I dearly love to see actors drowning. It is so obviously not quite what they had in mind when they were at Rada. It must be a surprise, when you are a personable young lad, to be dragged half drowned from the freezing sea, shot, thrown in a water-filled grave and, as a valediction, described as arse face. Noël Coward said firmly he would like to play a part in which he was cheerful throughout and bone-dry.

Colin Firth would disagree. There was a tremendous man-hunt ("View-halloo!") in Sharpe's Regiment when the bad guys, one in a top hat ("Ah, Sir Henry!"), one with a twirly moustache ("How dare you look up at an officer!") and one in imminent danger of apoplexy ("You're filth! What are you? Filth!") hunted Sharpe, Harper, his friend, and Arseface, the lad who had understandably gone off the whole idea of military service, over a disturbingly beautiful salt marsh. It seemed in three minds whether it was earth or sea or melting mud. The galloping horses were silhouetted against a vast and vacant sky. It looked like the kingdom of the conger eel. (This otherworldly place is, apparently, Horsey Island off Felixstowe.)

The story was about as intelligible as a battle. No one was too clear what was going on but everyone was relieved ("Huzza!") when it was resolved in our favour. Briefly, having led the first battalion of the South Essex where, as Falstaff put it, they were peppered, Sharpe returned to England to collect the second battalion. It had mysteriously vanished. A man with shorter legs would have asked about a bit. Someone would probably have noticed 400 soldiers in scarlet and gold firing muskets. Sharpe, being a hero, feigned death, re-enlisted under a false name and was drafted into the missing battalion. Apparently someone in the government was selling off soldiers at 50 guineas a go, an enterprising early form of privatisation.

The Prince Regent came into it somehow and a job lot of ladies, one with a memorable bust, one with a title and one with ringlets.

"Bravo, Dick!" as the Prince Regent put it.

Now sit up and look sensible.

What name is given to the planet of the solar system tenth in distance from the sun whose existence was proposed on the basis of calculations of its effects on the orbits of Halley's comet and the planets Pluto and Neptune?

Oh, come on! Come on! All right. An easy one.

Add the square root of 196 to the cube root of 64.

Come *on*. You could become suicidally depressed listening to the London School of Economics and Imperial College in **University Challenge Final '96** (BBC2). Until, like the first twitter of the dawn chorus and a brightening of the sky, it occurred to you that they were just very good at sums.

They were sizzling stuff on the analogue of mass in rotational motion but were porelessly impervious to classical music, null and void on the Christian calendar and a busted flush on Shakespeare.

They really believed that Dylan Thomas wrote: "Play up! play up! and play the game!" Dylan Thomas could not have written "Play up! play up! and play the game!" if you had beaten him for a week with a cricket bat. I looked quite kindly on the lads after this. On Northcott R., and his exciting shirt, studying methodolgy of game theory. On Bradshaw N. from Krypton, studying artificial neural networks.

Jeremy ("Come on!") Paxman, gamely wearing a tie with a piece of pineapple on it to take their minds off their troubles, offered struggling LSE every encouragement: "70-0. A storming start but it's terribly early days." . . . "Ten minutes to go, plenty of time to score 100 points."

The race is not always to the swift nor the battle to the strong, but that's the way to bet. Imperial won. Their captain had laid a £40 bet at 33 to 1. How much did he win?

Oh, come on, come on.

Dance to the music of time

Judith Mackrell on the Royal Ballet's reappraisal of Anastasia, which hasn't been performed for decades

KENNETH MacMILLAN'S three-act ballet Anastasia is being danced by the Royal Ballet for the first time in 18 years. During the intervening period it has slipped into a kind of twilight zone of scribbled notes, faded newspaper reviews and memories, and bringing it back to life has been a laborious business — it is almost like reviving the bloom of a pressed flower. It's for a very good reason that dance is always called the most ephemeral of the arts.

During the 18th and 19th centuries it was a miracle that ballets survived at all, for until this century there was no complete system for recording them. People scribbled notes and kept records, but essentially a new dancer had to learn a role from an older dancer or ballet master. This meant that the original steps often got distorted — errors could creep in through one dancer's faulty memory or another's flawed technique. And because dance wasn't subject to copyright, people changed ballets to suit themselves. After Petipa and Ivanov created their Swan Lake in 1895, dozens of new versions appeared around the world, some wildly different from the original.

Now that dance notation is widely used, the lives of ballets are less precarious. Yet to get a work back from the written score and into the dancers' bodies is still an awkward business. The Benesh system records steps as abstract limbs drawn on a five-line stave, with symbols denoting the timing and placing. But this system can only be read and written by a small band of professionals. So while actors learn their lines before rehearsals, or musicians practise their parts, dancers have to be shown every step by a choreologist.

This is an exhausting process. During a rehearsal of Anastasia that I watched, everyone seemed to spend much of the time just counting. Leading the counting was choreologist Monica Parker, who notated the ballet on its first creation and who was now demonstrating all of its movements to the dancers. Shadowing her were Viviana Durante and Leanne Benjamin (who are first- and second-cast Anastasias respectively).

Anastasia tells the story of Tsar Nicholas II's youngest daughter, who may or may not have been murdered by the Bolsheviks along with the rest of her family. MacMillan became interested in her history after reading about a Berlin mental patient called Anna Andersen, who claimed to be the surviving Anastasia; and in his first version of the ballet he concentrated the plot into a dark, traumatic single act in which Andersen relives her past from her hospital ward. He later decided to expand the ballet to three acts, showing Anastasia's life at court. But this version was much less popular, criticised for being too long, confusingly narrated and unable to justify the musical patchwork of its score.

After a couple of seasons the ballet was dropped. MacMillan refused to abandon it and before his death in 1992 he often talked of staging a new version. Although his widow Deborah has been able to advise the Royal Ballet on the cuts he'd planned to make, the revival still needed a live link to the first production. The pivotal figure sitting in the rehearsal studio has been the ballerina Lynn Seymour, who not only danced the title role but helped MacMillan create it. Though she says she can't remember specific details of what she contributed ("It was just part of the chemistry in the rehearsal room") she, more than anyone, knows what MacMillan wanted.

SHE THINKS Anastasia was "a very good role to dance. It's not airy-fairy, it's about a real 20th century person. I feel really lucky to have been around when it was made. The ballet still feels wildly contemporary and hasn't lost an ounce of its expressiveness." As she coaches a new generation of dancers, passing on her knowledge of the role, Seymour tends to sing the phrases that the others so diligently count. She says: "It's a kind of discipline, the music comes back and the steps come back and then you can remember what Kenneth wanted."

Whenever Seymour moved in to fine-tune a step that Parker had demonstrated, the choreography came into eloquent focus. Seymour was famous for taking risks as a dance actress and even in her late fifties she can still make her body express intemperate emotion. As she took Durante through details in the choreography she added a new, wild force to a phrase simply by stressing the downward thrust of its steps; she turned a series of kicks into a screaming fit, and made a circling of the upper torso look like a woozy loss of control. Seymour says it was always finding the meaning behind the steps that was her "main reason for dancing, whether it was Petipa or a new piece", and she's concerned to ensure that today's Anastasias perform MacMillan's choreography "as if it was fresh, not something they've rehearsed or borrowed from another ballet. They have to fight not to fall into clichéd movements".



Lynn Seymour (front) rehearses Leanne Benjamin for the title role she danced in the 1967 première of Anastasia PHOTO: ANTHONY CRICKMAY

Sustaining this dramatic and stylistic accuracy is demanding, since Anastasia develops from a pre-pubescent girl in Act 1 to an adult woman wrestling with the loss of her identity. By the last act not only has much of the choreography become harshly unballetic, but Anastasia has retreated inside her head. To dance a character's mind is not easy, as Durante confirms. "She's so tormented and angry inside. Lynn says it's really important to have a script running through your head as you dance. She says, 'Don't think ballerina, don't think steps.' Actually I wish I could rehearse this act in jeans. When you've put on pointe shoes it's difficult not to walk like a dancer and look a certain way. It's hard to be a real person."

For dancers performing as wide a repertory as the Royal Ballet's, it can be hard to hold on to all the idiosyncratic details that make each ballet unique. Rehearsal time is always pressured; dancers' bodies and memories are often overloaded and it's tempting for them to smooth out differences between styles, to dance steps in conveniently generalised ways. This is why it's so helpful to have dancers who know a ballet's original conception. But Seymour isn't trying to make Durante or her fellow Anastasias into clones of her younger self. "I tell them what Kenneth wanted and the fun bit is to help them find themselves in it, to tell them what is or isn't working. There's always the chance that they might do it better."

In some revivals a young dancer can almost creepily seem to metamorphose into the body and soul of the artist who originally performed the role. The act of dancing movements that were intimately tailored to another's style and physique momentarily turns them into that dancer. But Durante is unlikely to morph into Seymour when she performs Anastasia: "We're physically very different and we react differently to things," she says.

"In the end," Durante says confidently, "I'll be making my own role."

Sex, the devil and hypocrisy

THEATRE
Michael Billington

IS THERE a new style emerging at Stratford-on-Avon? In recent years we have been confronted by a meaningless eclecticism, but Gale Edwards's production of Webster's The White Devil in The Swan is verbally strong, visually clear and, like the main-house As You Like It, played in period costume. You emerge discussing the play rather than arguing about the concept.

Edwards shows that sex is both the play's driving force and the source of moral double standards. Vittoria, the eponymous heroine, and the lustful Brachiano (Ray Fearon) are brought together by a fierce adulterous passion, but she is made the public scapegoat for their sins just as Brachiano's wife, Isabella, is castigated for provoking his infidelity. Webster emerges as a sharp-eyed analyst of male power structures.

Edwards makes the point clearly without denying the play's complexity. Jane Gurnett's Vittoria is a strongly sexual figure who can hardly wait to unlace her blood-red frock. But in the great trial scene she greets the ravings of the Cardinal, Monticelso, with monumental dignity. This is the high point of the evening, with Philip Voss's superb Monticelso lip-smackingly inveighing against whores as "poisoned perfumes" while peering surreptitiously down Vittoria's dress.

The idea that Webster's women are both strong-willed and victimised is reinforced by Teresa Banham's unusually vehement portrayal of the wronged Isabella. She is first seen kissing her husband's portrait: the one by which she is later poisoned. And when she takes on the moral responsibility for Brachiano's rejection of her it is with a richly ambiguous mixture of altruism and anger.

Webster's play is often thought of as structurally fragmented: an accumulation of brilliant scenes and lines without a moral centre. But Edwards binds it together by her emphasis on female resilience and by acknowledging contradiction of character. Richard McCabe's excellent Flamineo is both the Jacobean intellectual malcontent and an incestuous pander who clearly wants to participate in Vittoria's couplings.

This production dismisses the clichéd image of Webster as a dramatist of death and decay. Instead it focuses on Webster's language which, in Agate's phrase, "ripples like the muscles in a statue of Rodin", and shows that women, in their sexuality and stoicism, offer a forceful counter to male corruption. An exemplary revival.

Flying south on the wings of a cormorant

THE Leeds-based English Northern Philharmonia is a rare visitor to London, *writes Andrew Clements*. Since Paul Daniel became the company's music director six years ago, however, he has steadily broadened the range of its activities, and a visit to the Barbican provided the best possible way of marking their progress. It is clear that when Daniel leaves for English National Opera in a year's time he will bequeath to his successor a highly resourceful and responsive band.

There was a newly-commissioned work to begin and a Mahler symphony to end, and between them were three opera extracts designed as a showcase for the superb bass, John Tomlinson.

Dancing For Cormorants, the new work by 23-year-old Andrew Sallist is confident, accomplished stuff. There are enough vivid ideas, inspired by a TV documentary about a Chinese peasant who trains the birds to catch fish, to suggest that Sallis's musical imagination is a highly potent one.

The ENP were equally forward and committed in Mahler's First. Daniel's view of the symphony was boldly drawn — the first movement unfolded layer by layer with mounting intensity, the bucolic rhythms of the scherzo lurching like a juggernaut, the surreal funeral march yielding to schmaltzy lyricism.

All the joys of monkey business

Stuart Jeffries

Grooming, Gossip and the Evolution of Language
by Robin Dunbar
Faber 230pp £15.99

WE USED to spend nearly a quarter of our time grooming each other, expressing mutual trust as our expert fingers stimulated the natural opiates of submissive bodies.

Admittedly, that was 30 million years ago, before we evolved into the big-brained, chattering, often physically inexpressive creatures we are today. One of the unexpected things this book does is to make us regret the loss of this asexual sensual world. Instead, we have language — that means of communicating at a distance, that pale substitute for a trusting relationship based on pleasurably surrendering to another's touch.

Robin Dunbar, professor of psychology at Liverpool University, never expresses such nostalgia for the social bonding of our primate ancestors, but his book opens with the evocative implication that he may have been groomed by a monkey. He speaks of "the initial frisson of uncertainty in an untested relationship, the gradual surrender to another's avid fingers flickering across bare skin, the light pinching and picking and nibbling of flesh".

Dunbar's purpose here is to show how such grooming became an evolutionary boon, and, subsequently, a burden. Primates lived in groups as a mutual defence against predators — they weren't yet Aristotle's "political animals", but none the less needed others in order to flourish.

Grooming, because it required such a disinterested investment of time from the groomer and gave such endorphin-fuelled pleasure to the groomee, proved an effective means of social bonding. Moreover, it was the ultimate test against free riders exploiting social co-operation merely for their own benefit and giving nothing back — that first and abiding stumbling block to society. You must be deeply attached to somebody or something in order to spend hours a day stroking and mauling them with no direct benefit to yourself.

Contrast that world with modern industrial society, that emerging dystopia of individuals deprived of community and kinship support. Many urban adults are so far removed from society, Dunbar argues, that they make friends thanks to their children's contacts through school and clubs: "It may not be too much of an exaggeration to suggest that improved nursery school provision may be more important for the parents than for the children."

This deprivation, this need for society, is occasionally met by manipulators of beguiling language, which generates opiate highs in listeners when used in the right way. From Hitler to Charles Manson, we are exposed to exploitation by strangers. How bitterly ironic: language was the very thing that was supposed to bond us together in human societies, to replace grooming with a time-effective communication; now, it can be used as a tool by the exploiters.

To consider language as a social glue, as Dunbar does, is unusual: we have learned from linguistics, speech science and psychology how it is produced, what grammar does and how children develop language skills, but little about why we alone among the species have it. To go further and suggest that "language evolved to allow us to gossip" seems initially trite, but once one considers that language supplanted grooming as the means of bonding, it seems less resistible.

This absorbing book elevates gossip from its status as a social evil to a social good in writing that is dizzyingly multidisciplinary but shows great generosity to the ordinary reader.

The horn of plenty

Steven Poole meets Lawrence Norfolk and finds him a disarmingly bright, young writer



The Pope's Rhinoceros: Lawrence Norfolk's gargantuan, dazzling fable

THERE ARE rats in Lawrence Norfolk's new book. Infesting the topographically unpredictable buildings of 16th century Rome, they consciously plan and execute sanguinary wars of espionage and repulse. There are herring, too. There is even a deliberating ant.

Such virtuosic anthropomorphisms abound in The Pope's Rhinoceros, furnishing both wry counterpoint to the human drama, and a visceral narrative bedrock. "I think most literary urges are really very primitive," Norfolk explains. "And if you've got animals, you can't have nebulous, nuanced desires to move the story on — they eat, they fuck, they shit. If you can root your action to those three really basic things, you've got a pretty unassailable story to tell."

He does. The Pope's Rhinoceros is a gargantuan, dazzling fable, based on the true story of how the Portuguese captured a rhinoceros for the pleasure-loving Pope Leo, only for their ship to be wrecked off the coast of Italy.

It is even better than his debut, the Augustan-steampunk classical-mythology conspiracy-thriller, Lemprière's Dictionary, published when he was an unknown 27-year-old. It won the 1992 Somerset Maugham Award and went on to sell half a million copies worldwide.

In person, however, Norfolk is an unassuming, slight figure, looking much younger than his 32 years. Disarmingly, almost the first thing he says is: "As a child, I didn't want to be a writer." Norfolk was born in London in 1963, but his family moved to Iraq, where his father, a civil engineer, built harbours and bridges, "most of which have since been blown up by the Americans, with cruise missiles".

They were then evacuated after the Six Day War in 1967 — "It was fairly traumatic and we lost everything" — and settled in Bath. Lawrence's parents later divorced, and he left home at 18 to read English at King's. (He currently lives in Chicago with his wife, Vineeta, a research scientist.) It wasn't a settled childhood. "For a long time I thought it didn't touch me at all," Norfolk remembers, "but then, when I think about the fights I got into, even as a seven-year-old — other kids in hospital, if not me . . ." He tails off.

The unmistakable impression, as Norfolk goes on to chatter about his love of skydiving ("the point is to get beyond that — without being too karmic about it") and his time spent reporting for Austrian News in Bosnia in 1993 ("a kind of adventure"), is of a diamond-hard confidence beneath the modest exterior.

CONFIDENCE is a prerequisite for spending four years writing a novel — Lemprière's Dictionary — that you're not sure anyone is going to read. Norfolk chuckles at the unlikelihood of his success: "It's 500 pages long, dense with classical allusions, and it's got no sex — of course it's gonna be an international bestseller!"

Norfolk admits to stealing from The Terminator for his latest novel, an appeal to "pop-culture sensibility". Mention of Asterix and Obelix as comic models for the heroes in The Pope's Rhinoceros elicits more nods. "It's a completely vulgar device. I'm always ready to junk the literary in the interests of having a reasonably good time."

He discusses his debt to Thomas Pynchon: "The technical thing of how to write prose with a lot of hard information in it. You have to turn description into a story; having a set of characters who are mouthpieces for theories is disastrous." Norfolk has also mapped research's limits. "What it smells like, what it tastes like — that's the hard stuff to get. You get to a certain point with the research and you know everything there is to know. Anything beyond that, you're free."

He felt a particular affinity with the period in which Lemprière is set: "There's a similarity between the end of the 18th century and the end of the 20th, in that there's an odd mixture of viciousness and good manners. I think that's abroad at the moment . . . "

Norfolk himself is an odd mixture of diffidence and rollicking eloquence — he speaks in fluent periods, weaving locutions like "transatlantic decollage" or, punningly, "Anti-Geist", lightning-fast. But he plays down his language skills — while admitting that he spoke Arabic and Welsh during his childhood, he says dismissively of what he now knows: "French, German, English, a bit of Latin, that's it."

Norfolk already has a couple of new ideas for books. His eyes glint happily as he reveals that one might be "sort of about boar hunting and German philosophy". The explanation of such an improbable link runs thus. Norfolk was intrigued, while staying in a French chateau last year, to hear the villagers extolling the virtues of the boar-hunting life. They all loved their boar hunting, yet only one person in recent memory had actually caught one, the boars proving too elusive. "It's like German philosophy," Norfolk insists, with infectious logic. "It has an object, it has an end, people pursue it single-mindedly all their lives . . . no boar!"

A pause. "That's the problem, you know: lack of boars."

The Pope's Rhinoceros is published by Sinclair-Stevenson, price £15.99

Members of this House

Jeremy Maule

Kitchen Venom
by Philip Hensher
Hamish Hamilton 260pp £16

CHATTERER readers will know by now the story on this novel. Philip Hensher is (it seems) indiscreetly gay, or gaily indiscreet, and is (no longer) a House of Commons Clerk. Both conditions bear heavily, as it happens, and for good on the achievement of his second fiction.

Kitchen Venom is a tightly cross-cut London melodrama of hateful sisters and restaurant embarrassments, clerkly ennuis and afternoon sex. Add a probable suicide, the murder of a beautiful and charming Italian rentboy and a stylish, angled account of the Last Days of Thatcher, and it all sounds a gloopy mix, impossibly bustling. Nothing could be further from the effect and tone. Airy, felicitous, superintendent, Hensher releases his staggered secrets and recognitions in a smart but unpredictable procession of bad behaviours. If Royal divorces were staged, and not just casually exhibited at tedious length, Hensher would be their perfect commentator: sharp to field-pattern, not a little sententious, acidly voluptuous on dress-sense and dress-nonsense.

And he rather likes powerful women to help him do so. Other Lulus, his first novel, gave the narration of its Vienna-after-Berg entanglements to a rising diva, comfortable in the power of her own gifts of voice, comfortable in that power with her own occasional inaccuracies. In Kitchen Venom Hensher plumps for a different sense of upper register: her name is (almost) Margaret. That one. In her busy obtrusive "I" the novel opens — somewhat flatly, with an overdetermined if brief little fable of omniscience, Hensher at his most Look Mum No Hands. (What is it with the alleged omniscience of the omniscient narrator?) And in a noble and singular ending, it's with the late Prime Minister's now-fading eye that the author performs the book's last, recuperative generosities. Not least to the teller: his sketch of that quality in her full plumage is as economically full as any.

Hensher is a rewarding novelist, for oddly divergent reasons. His clevernesses are manifold, if not always manifest, buried sometimes in the glint of eclectic homages that run through the prose, from Molesworth to Alice Thomas Ellis. (Not always buried — Trollope and Compton-Burnett peep from their coffin-lids rather creakily.) His narration is remarkable for the casual stateliness and manic range of its frequent judgments. The questionable utility of Pimlico, of ice-cream recipes, of hair putties, of MPs incapable of understanding the rules of their own legislature are all lightly inspected. Under this easy surface of intelligence, some of it lax enough, runs a tighter scoring. Hensher's great gift is for the plainest of dialogue, lots of it, and for what it withholds. He has an excellent ear for those cadences of repetition that freight our half-incompetent interactions in speech to the heavy weights of obstinacy or possessiveness.

AND SEX? And Parliament? I was coming to that. Hensher's novel makes effective, technical play with its ruined lives by invoking a contrast endemic to the parliamentary record. It bounces a noisy book of mere words — that textual massage-parlour most readers know as Hansard — off the squarer, less familiar notations of the Commons Journal, that dry tea-block of Supposedly Real Decisions. "The Journal wrote what was essential. The Journal wrote the beginnings and ends of things." Kitchen Venom is a sad story about a man who writes that Journal, his clerkly helpers, his children, his sex-life, its encounters, their consequences.

Acts of parliament start in bills and petitions and often die as them; involve an intercourse between partners and sometimes, usually, rush it; require speech, with its returns and courtesies, between stages; reach a formal ending in the signification of pleasure and assent. Hensher's Kitchen Venom imagines all these stages between people and then goes further, in its astringent charity, by conceiving some of their unforeseen consequences. And by choosing to halt before them.

Jeremy Maule is a former House of Lords Clerk

Deadpan wizard

Ian Thomson

The World, the World
by Norman Lewis
Cape 293pp £18.99

BRAINTREE "is the sort of place people walk around with their heads under their arms", Norman Lewis once said. Apparently an ordinary Essex town, it is thought to lie in a pocket of the paranormal. Born 88 years ago in the terminal London suburb of Enfield, Lewis himself now lives outside Braintree in a parsonage. Readers of his first volume of autobiography, Jackdaw Cake, will recall how the writer as a child was subjected to crystal-balling. His mother was a psychic artist able to emit ectoplasm through her vagina, while his father was a retail chemist.

The World, The World is the second and, sadly, final part of Norman Lewis's autobiography. It comes 10 years after the first volume, and takes us from Enfield to Guatemala via Brazil and Peru by way of Braintree, heartland of the poltergeist. A wizard of deadpan wit, Lewis's celebrated books on Indochina and the Italian Mafia catalogue with anthropological exactitude the weirdest rites and rituals. Here he describes how a new religion flourished in South Vietnam, with Victor Hugo as its chief saint.

Lewis is not a typical travel writer. His schooling at Enfield Grammar could hardly turn him into a patrician pathfinder. The early eighties saw a rash of travel books by wannabes who sought to create artificial difficulties for themselves — "Hang-gliding to Limpopo", "Sideways to Nairobi on a Giraffe". Lewis was above all this; in 1968 he published a famously compassionate magazine article — it was 12,500 words long — about the extermination of Brazilian Indians which led to the foundation of Survival International.

Today, there's an air of the pre-war about the Sage of Enfield: his toothbrush moustache and sad spaniel eyes. This book is mothballed in memories and opens just after the war when Lewis's Sicilian in-laws, the Corvajas, are domiciled in Bloomsbury.

In the late forties, having sold his camera shop in Holborn, Lewis divorces Ernestina Corvaja and settles in Wales to write a book on the pre-Hispanic culture of Central America. Lewis says he put five years into this project, off and on, yet it must have subsided into the great limbo of unpublished works. The same cannot be said for Voices Of The Old Sea, Lewis's classic account of the years he spent in a Catalonian fishing village. The book is pure poetry; now, of course, this remote outpost is part of the Costa Brava.

In this memoir Lewis bewails the damage caused not only by Bible-thumping missionaries, but also by mass tourism. But if aboriginal tribes wear penis gourds under Bugs Bunny T-shirts, is this really such a loss? His friendship with Ian Fleming, however, is a hoot. The two are chalk and cheese yet they shared an admiration for Ernest Hemingway. In 1957, as a newspaperman, Fleming commissioned Lewis to interview the grand old man in Cuba. To his dismay, he finds a rheumy-eyed wreck in his pyjamas, swigging from a bottle of Dubonnet. Lewis urgently cabled home to Fleming: "To meet Hemingway was a shattering experience likely to sabotage ambition." (The American novelist shot himself not long after.) Lewis has often taken a dim view of American culture. His superb thriller The Sicilian Specialist, was based at the time — 1974 — on undisclosed facts about the Kennedy assassination and was removed from sale in some American cities following a Mafia ban. The World, The World is vintage Norman Lewis; the light lash of his humour, his sniffer-dog's nose for the quirky, the lyrical brilliance of his prose.



Norman Lewis bewails the damage of mass tourism PHOTO DON McCULLIN

Industrial homicide

Jenny Turner

The Devil's Carousel
by Jeff Torrington
Secker & Warburg 226pp £15.99

JEFF TORRINGTON'S first novel, the Whitbread prize-winning Swing Hammer Swing! (1992), was set in the Gorbals in the late 1960s, just as the famous Glasgow slum was in the middle of being torn down. For his second book, Torrington has built himself a perfect working model of an automobile-production plant, late-1970s style. It could be Linwood, it could be Dagenham. But one thing's for certain — it's a human hell on earth.

Our first insight into life at the Centaur car factory in Chimeford comes to us care of a new recruit. Has Laker heard of Murphy's law? his supervisor asks him. "Well, this is where the bugger lives." The Centaur plant is an out-and-out disaster area, a place in which everything is set up to go wrong. Management despises its workers; the workers, unsurprisingly, despise their management. There's a ludicrously elaborate system of surveillance, yet it seems only to exacerbate the pilfering, skiving and sabotage. The union is just a bad joke, managing to be both obstructive and ineffectual. The whole thing's excruciating, like an engine with no oil in it.

Swing Hammer Swing! was rightly acclaimed as a very funny book. The Devil's Carousel is also very funny, except that its humour is bloated and bad-tempered. "Midge, it was rumoured, packed a sex-cannon that Flynn's legendary endowment look like a Derringer pistolette . . ." That's the purple prose of terminal boredom. It's common around workplaces, but that doesn't stop it from being a humour based on despair. Haskins, the super-zealous security snitch, is making breakfast for his disabled wife, just before leaving for his works retirement do. "This was it! This was them for the rest of their lives, a pair of old juiceless fossils buried in a graveyard of dead hopes." Imagine leaving for your retirement do, feeling you have nothing left to look forward to. Imagine looking back with nostalgia on a working life in which all you were employed to do was to spy on everybody else.

Torrington saves his cruellest joke for his last two chapters. A shop steward has been asked to convene an extraordinary union meeting. Everybody, from the most do-right lefty to the wildcat anarchist sucking contemptuously on his fag, is shocked to his very bones to discover why the meeting has been called. "B-but they c-can't do that. Not the entire plant. Why, that's tantamount to industrial homicide . . ." The reader, of course, has long since been placed in the powerful but unpleasant position of Ghost of Christmas Future nineties-style.

One of the problems with historical hindsight is that it all too easily collapses into nostalgia. Now that Britain's productive industries are long dead, we imagine it must have been like heaven back in the days they were alive. This sharp, sardonic novel brilliantly shows the fallacy of this thinking.

A dash of Derrida

Elizabeth Young

In the Cut
by Susanna Moore
Picador 179pp £12.99

SUSANNA MOORE has hit the jackpot with this, her fourth novel. Very adroitly she has produced something which critics and sophisticated readers perpetually crave — a contemporary novel which not only acknowledges all the twists and turns of postmodern literary studies but is simultaneously a highly readable and compulsive page-turner. It is also very short, which doesn't hurt.

Bret Easton Ellis (a friend) tells Moore that her book is "the most shocking thing I've ever read". This is complete nonsense. So are suggestions that the book should carry a warning sticker. It actually registers rather low on the shock-o-meter. The cognoscenti have gone completely overboard — and drowned.

This jaundiced tone has been slightly exacerbated by the unfortunate coincidence of my having recently read an unpretentious, vin ordinaire 1996 American thriller with — when stripped to the bone — an identical plot. Elise Title's Bleeding Hearts is highly effective genre realism. No hype, few reviews. Without spoiling the chase the bedrock structure in both books runs thus: girl meets homicide detective and his partner during murder inquiry, starts steamy affair with detective, realises only he can be the killer, turns to his partner for help in entrapment.

This similarity is not sinister — plots are famously few; it's not what you do, it's the way that you do it. It did, however, detract from Moore's much-praised "knock-out ending" and serve to underline the vast gap in status between mass-market and literary fiction. It's amazing what a dash of Derrida will do.

The first third is very good indeed. Moore sews up the post-mortem linguistic angle by having her narrator, Frannie, teach creative writing at NYU. Frannie, intelligent, articulate, is increasingly stressed. It's summer in the city; Washington Square is choking in the heat. Death is all around.

One of Frannie's students is writing a paper on serial killer John Wayne Gacy. She glimpses a neighbourhood girl who is murdered shortly afterwords and in the words of cool, sexy Detective Malloy, "disarticulated". This particular word is the fulcrum for the book. Clever Frannie, plunging irrationally into her hot 'n' heavy affair with the non-grammatical, blue-collar Malloy is herself gradually disarticulated, emotionally, intellectually and, eventually, otherwise.

Ultimately, however, the post-modern aspirations of the novel seems pretty spurious and fail to come together. Moore repeatedly, distractedly raises a plethora of serious issues — in particular the linguistic gap between the intelligentsia and others, how this affects every aspect of their life and work, and how hard it is to penetrate and evaluate these differences.

The middle section flags badly. Frannie, admittedly overpowered by the mendacious and "opaque" Malloy, becomes duller and dimmer. Moore has to fall back on the tight format of that excellent plot. But even at the denouement Moore is compelled to be deep. Frannie believes in knowledge. "Knowing don't mean shit," says Malloy. But this too really leads nowhere.

Paperbacks

Nicholas Lezard

Heart's Journey in Winter, by James Buchan (Harvill, £6.99)

"I DON'T believe this country has a better writer to offer than James Buchan," says the poet Michael Hofmann, and, implicitly, the Guardian, giving him its 1995 Fiction Award; the author photograph on the back cover shows his face, for all the world as weary and hopeless as the spy narrator of this novel, who plays his little part in the Central European drama kicked into action by the Russians' deployment of SS-20s. As spy stories go, it is in a class of its own, although the heavy literary sensibility pulls against the genre's own absurd demands: unlikely dialogue, statements where humanity and portentousness slug it out — "Love, in particular, is the circus hoop through which history is forced to jump, over and over again." If this is true, then Buchan is a gifted ringmaster indeed. But if it isn't . . . Ach, read it anyway.

Accountable to None: The Tory Nationalisation of Britain, by Simon Jenkins (Penguin, £7.99)

IN A nutshell: while pretending to decentralise, to devolve power to the hands of local trusts, authorities, or whatnot, the successive Tory administrations have in fact presided over an extraordinary and unprecedented concentration of might into the hands of a minute and biased clique. I suppose it is better that Jenkins has realised this now, and said so, than that he had never done so at all. Elegantly written, as everyone agrees.

War in European History, by Michael Howard (Opus/OUP, £7.99)

A NEAT vertical slice through the stratified mud of European war, from the Knights Templar to the nuclear stalemate. Historical changes in the status quo by no means invalidate its thrust ("nothing has occurred since 1945 to indicate that war, or the threat of it, could not still be an effective instrument of state policy"). A brilliant writer, a billion times more intelligent than his wretched namesake.

Who's Who of Religions, ed John R Hinnells (Penguin, £8.99)

SPLENDID little encyclopedia; the best one I've seen which covers the subject. I particularly relish the entry on Sampson Oppong, the Ghanaian prophet who, imprisoned for embezzlement, had a vision exhorting him to preach for reform; he ignored it, "and became a practising sorcerer and successful swindler". The Holy Ghost had better luck a second time, until Oppong was hauled up before the beak for "drinking heavily".

Football Premiership: Middlesbrough 0 Manchester United 3

United sail towards historic double

David Lacey

HISTORY beckons Manchester United. Now only Liverpool stand between Alex Ferguson's team and a unique second double, the first of which they achieved only two years ago.

After a fitful first half at the Riverside Stadium on Sunday, Old Trafford's third Premiership title in four seasons was clinched with something to spare. They meet Liverpool at Wembley on Saturday.

For a time Middlesbrough, refusing to be cowed by either the occasion or an early goal from David May, threatened to spoil United's day. But then Andy Cole came off the bench early in the second half to score with his first touch before Ryan Giggs completed another day of triumph for Ferguson with another memorable goal.

So the team that trailed Newcastle United by 12 points in late January has won the championship for the 10th time, equalling Arsenal's total. Now only Liverpool, with their 18 titles, have won it more often.

Administrative red tape had lined up a replica of the Premiership trophy for Manchester United on Sunday — something to do with the hypothetical logistics of a home triumph on Tyneside. No matter: there was no doubting the real champions.

Peter Schmeichel, probably rightly, thought that the 1993 championship, United's first for 26 years, had been more exciting "because the folks had waited so long for it". Yet this time the moment surely carried more meaning.

Eight of the United players who appeared are under 25; three are 21 and Phil Neville is still 19. "They've stayed in the swimming pool all the time," said Ferguson, "which says a lot for them."

Next season, then, Manchester United will enter the Champions' League with youth on their side and virtually free of foreign restrictions. Moreover, they have won the league with a new-year surge reminiscent of Liverpool at the height of their powers. Since losing 4-1 at Tottenham on January 1 they have won 13 games out of 16 and drawn two.

Newcastle simply could not keep up the pace. Having established their 12-point lead, they then dropped 21 out of the next 45. By contrast United allowed only another five points to slip away.

The victory, though convincing in the end, was far from a formality. "There's only one Bryan Robson," the United fans chanted politely, but Robson's Middlesbrough side made his old team work hard for a win which in the end they did not need.

May's goal, after 13 minutes, exploited the nervousness Middlesbrough had already shown at corners. The centre-back met Giggs's swerving centre with a sharp downward header that beat Gary Walsh while Branco could only help the ball into the net.

The goal settled any lingering nerves among Ferguson's players, Cox having given them severe palpitations in the opening minute by heading Juninho's centre just wide. Yet Juninho's sudden dashes at the defence still unsettled United.

That Middlesbrough did not draw level was due to a mixture of excellent defending by May and a little luck. After 24 minutes Barmby, timing his leap well, beat the advancing Schmeichel to a long ball from Pearson and flicked it towards an unguarded goal. Riverside and Tyneside must have groaned in unison as the ball bounced the wrong side of the near post.

Barmby then missed a more straightforward opportunity. Again Juninho created the chance, and last autumn Barmby would have found the net with his eyes closed. But now, off balance, he put the ball well wide.

With Schmeichel dropping on a header from Mustoe and Fjortoft beginning to cause problems, there appeared to be more than a flicker of life left in the championship. In the event the issue remained in doubt no longer than the eight minutes that elapsed before Ferguson brought on Cole for his extra pace.

What on earth was the Manchester United manager playing at? Surely Scholes was more fundamental to his needs, one thought.

Thirty seconds later Cantona nodded on Giggs's corner and Cole, showing the predatory instincts which had persuaded Ferguson to buy him, beat Walsh with an overhead shot.

The rest was academic until Giggs provided the perfect embellishment. Gathering a pass from Butt on the left, the Welshman made space as a matter of routine before dispatching a left-footed shot of typical audacity past Walsh.

"Stick to selling Sugar Puffs, Kev," sang a Manchester United banner. For Ferguson, victory over Liverpool at Wembley on Saturday would be sweeter still.



May Day . . . A jubilant David May, scorer of United's first goal against Middlesbrough, holds the title trophy aloft PHOTO: LAURENCE GRIFFITHS

Winners and losers

PREM	**Champions** Manchester United		
	Runners-up Newcastle United		
	Europe Man Utd, Newcastle, Liverpool, Aston Villa, Arsenal		
	Relegated Bolton Wanderers, QPR, Manchester City		
FIRST	**Champions** Sunderland	**Promoted** Derby County	
	Play-offs Charlton v Crystal Palace, Leicester v Stoke. First leg May 12, Second leg May 15, Final May 27		
	Relegated Luton, Watford, Millwall		
SECOND	**Champions** Swindon Town	**Promoted** Oxford United	
	Play-offs Bradford v Blackpool, Crewe v Notts County. First leg May 12, Second leg May 15, Final May 26		
	Relegated Hull, Brighton, Swansea, York or Carlisle		
THIRD	**Champions** Preston	**Promoted** Gillingham, Bury	
	Play-offs Colchester v Plymouth, Hereford v Darlington. First leg May 12, Second leg May 15, Final May 25		
	Bottom Torquay		

Football results and final tables

FA CARLING PREMIERSHIP
Arsenal 2, Bolton 1; Chelsea 2, Blackburn 3; Coventry 0, Leeds 0; Everton 1, Aston Villa 0; Man City 2, Liverpool 2; Middlesbrough 0, Man Utd 3; Newcastle 1, Tottenham 1; Nottm Forest 3, QPR 0; Southampton 0, Wimbledon 0; West Ham 1, Sheff Wed 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Man Utd	38	25	7	6	73	35	82
Newcastle	38	24	6	8	66	37	78
Liverpool	38	20	11	7	70	34	71
Aston Villa	38	18	9	11	52	35	63
Arsenal	38	17	12	9	49	32	63
Everton	38	17	10	11	64	44	61
Blackburn	38	18	7	13	61	47	61
Tottenham	38	16	13	9	50	38	61
Nottm Forest	38	15	13	10	50	54	58
West Ham	38	14	9	15	43	52	51
Chelsea	38	12	14	12	46	44	50
Middlesbrough	38	11	10	17	35	50	43
Leeds	38	12	7	19	40	57	43
Wimbledon	38	10	11	17	55	70	41
Sheff Wed	38	10	10	18	48	61	40
Coventry	38	8	14	16	42	60	38
Southampton	38	9	11	18	34	52	38
Man City	38	9	11	18	33	58	38
QPR	38	9	6	23	38	57	33
Bolton	38	8	5	25	39	71	29

ENDSLEIGH LEAGUE: First Division
Birmingham 1, Reading 2; Charlton 1, Wolverhampton 1; Crystal Palace 0, Norwich 1; Huddersfield 0, Portsmouth 1; Ipswich 0, Millwall 0; Oldham 1, Luton 0; Stoke 1, Southend 0; Tranmere 2, Sunderland 0; Watford 0, Leicester 1; West Brom 3, Derby 2; Barnsley 1, Grimsby 1; Sheff Utd 1, Port Vale 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sunderland	46	22	17	7	59	33	83
Derby	46	21	16	9	71	51	79
Crystal Palace	46	20	15	11	67	48	75
Stoke	46	20	13	13	60	49	73
Leicester	46	19	14	13	66	60	71
Charlton	46	17	20	9	57	45	71
Ipswich	46	19	12	15	79	69	69
Huddersfield	46	17	12	17	61	58	63
Sheff Utd	46	16	14	16	57	54	62
Barnsley	46	14	18	14	60	66	60
West Brom	46	16	12	18	60	68	60
Port Vale	46	15	15	16	59	66	60
Tranmere	46	14	17	15	64	60	59
Southend	46	15	14	17	52	61	59
Birmingham	46	15	13	18	61	64	58
Norwich	46	14	15	17	59	55	57
Grimsby	46	14	14	18	55	69	56
Oldham	46	14	14	18	54	50	56
Reading	46	13	17	16	54	63	56
Wolverhampton	46	13	16	17	56	62	55
Portsmouth	46	13	13	20	61	69	52
Millwall	46	13	13	20	43	63	52
Watford	46	10	18	18	62	70	48
Luton	46	11	12	23	40	64	45

Second Division: Brentford 2, Bournemouth 0; Bristol Rvrs 2, Wycombe 1; Burnley 2, Shrewsbury 1; Carlisle 2, Bristol C 1; Chesterfield 1, Notts Co 0; Hull 2, Bradford C 3; Oxford Utd 4, Peterborough 0; Rotherham 0, Wrexham 1; Swansea 2, Crewe 1; Swindon 0, Stockport 0; Walsall 2, Brighton 1; York 0, Blackpool 2.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Swindon	46	25	17	4	71	34	92
Oxford Utd	46	24	11	11	76	39	83
Blackpool	46	23	13	10	67	40	82
Notts County	46	21	15	10	63	39	78
Crewe	46	22	7	17	77	60	73
Bradford	46	22	7	17	71	69	73
Chesterfield	46	20	12	14	56	51	72
Wrexham	46	18	16	12	76	55	70
Stockport	46	19	13	14	61	47	70
Bristol Rovers	46	20	10	16	57	60	70
Walsall	46	19	12	15	60	45	69
Wycombe	46	15	15	16	63	59	60
Bristol City	46	15	15	16	55	60	60
Bournemouth	46	16	10	20	51	70	58
Brentford	46	15	13	18	43	49	58
Rotherham	46	14	14	18	54	62	56
Burnley	46	14	13	19	56	68	55
Shrewsbury	46	13	14	19	58	70	53
Peterborough	46	13	13	20	59	66	52
Carlisle	46	12	13	21	57	72	49
York	45	12	13	20	55	72	49
Swansea	46	11	14	21	43	79	47
Brighton	46	10	10	26	46	69	40
Hull	46	5	16	25	36	78	31

Third Division: Barnet 3, Fulham 0; Bury 3, Cardiff 0; Cambridge Utd 2, L Orient 0; Chester 2, Mansfield 1; Colchester 1, Doncaster 0; Gillingham 1, Scarborough 0; Hereford 2, Rochdale 0; Lincoln 5, Torquay 0; Plymouth 3, Hartlepool 0; Preston 2, Exeter 0; Scunthorpe 3, Darlington 3; Wigan 1, Northampton 2.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Preston	46	23	17	6	78	38	86
Gillingham	46	22	17	7	49	20	83
Bury	46	22	13	11	66	48	79
Plymouth	46	22	12	12	68	49	78
Darlington	46	20	18	8	60	42	78
Hereford	46	20	14	12	65	47	74
Colchester	46	18	18	10	61	51	72
Chester	46	18	16	12	72	53	70
Barnet	46	18	16	12	65	45	70
Wigan	46	20	10	16	62	56	70
Northampton	46	18	13	15	51	44	67
Scunthorpe	46	15	15	16	67	61	60
Doncaster	46	16	11	19	49	60	59
Exeter	46	13	18	15	46	53	57
Rochdale	46	14	13	19	57	61	55
Cambridge Utd	46	14	12	20	61	71	54
Fulham	46	12	17	17	57	63	53
Lincoln	46	13	14	19	57	73	53
Mansfield	46	11	20	15	54	64	53
Hartlepool	46	12	13	21	47	67	49
Leyton Orient	46	12	11	23	44	63	47
Cardiff	46	11	12	23	41	64	45
Scarborough	46	8	16	22	39	69	40
Torquay	46	5	14	27	30	84	29

BELL'S SCOTTISH LEAGUE: Premier Division: Aberdeen 2, Falkirk 1; Celtic 4, Raith 1; Hibernian 1, Partick 0; Kilmarnock 0, Rangers 3; Motherwell 1, Hearts 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Rangers	36	27	6	3	85	25	87
Celtic	36	24	11	1	74	25	83
Aberdeen	36	16	7	13	52	45	55
Hearts	36	16	7	13	55	53	55
Hibernian	36	11	10	15	43	57	43
Raith	36	12	7	17	41	57	43
Kilmarnock	36	11	8	17	39	54	41
Motherwell	36	9	12	15	28	39	39
Partick	36	8	6	22	29	62	30
Falkirk	36	6	6	24	31	60	24

SCOTTISH LEAGUE: First Division Dundee 0, St Johnstone 0; Dunfermline 2, Airdrie 1; Greenock Morton 2, Dundee Utd 2; Hamilton 2, Dumbarton 1; St Mirren 1, Clydebank 2. **Final leading positions:** 1, Dunfermline (played 36, points 71); 2, Dundee Utd (36-67); 3, Greenock Morton (36-67).

Second Division: Berwick 2, Ayr 1; Clyde 0, Queen of South 0; East Fife 0, Stirling 1; Montrose 0, Stranraer 1; Stenhousemuir 0, Forfar 2. **Final leading positions:** 1, Stirling (36-81); 2, East Fife (36-67); 3, Berwick (36-60).

Third Division: Alloa 2, Cowdenbeath 1; Arbroath 2, Albion 1; Caledonian T 1, Livingston 2; East Stirling 3, Brechin 0; Ross County 0, Queen's Park 1. **Final leading positions:** 1, Livingston (36-72); 2, Brechin (36-63); 3, Caledonian T (36-57).

Hoddle fulfils ambition to lead England

Martin Thorpe

GLENN HODDLE accepted the job of England manager last week after two days of intense speculation. The Chelsea manager will take up the national reins after the European Championship on July 1.

At 38, Hoddle will be the youngest England manager and the least experienced, having been a club manager only five years.

However, once Kevin Keegan, Gerry Francis and Bryan Robson ruled themselves out of the reckoning to replace Terry Venables, Hoddle was the obvious choice for the Football Association sub-committee charged with finding a new manager.

Although he has won nothing with Chelsea he has fashioned an attractive team who reached the 1994 FA Cup final and did well in Europe. The former Spurs midfielder won 53 England caps and also had a playing spell with Monaco.

When Hoddle announced his decision at a press conference on Thursday, he admitted that it had been a heart-rending two days, and "it was the only job I would leave Chelsea for". But leading England was "a privilege and an honour and a burning ambition since a very young age. It is the pinnacle of any management career and the timing was right."

Hoddle will take over from Venables after Euro '96, tied to a four-year contract worth a reputed £250,000 a year. His first priority is to lead England to the 1998 World Cup finals, with the opening qualifier on September 1.

Sports Diary Shiv Sharma

Going gets rough

HOOLIGANISM marred the final week of the domestic football season, with 14 fans arrested at Ipswich, where Millwall were relegated from the First Division after a goalless draw. The travelling fans tore up seats and threw them at home supporters after the final whistle. Fighting broke out later in a car park.

There was also violence before and during Bradford City's match at Hull. A goal in the 56th minute gave Bradford a 3-2 victory to go into the play-offs. The match was held up for 11 minutes as Hull fans demonstrated against their club's officials and later clashed with visiting supporters in the streets. Twenty arrests were made and three policemen injured. Brighton was the scene of rioting a week earlier.

MATTHEW SIMMONS, the hooligan who was the target of Eric Cantona's kung fu-style kick during Manchester United's game against Crystal Palace at Selhurst Park early last year, was at the centre of a courtroom drama at Croydon, south London.

He was found guilty of provoking the United star, but when the prosecutor Jeffrey McCann — on his last case before retirement — asked for Simmons to be banned from all football grounds, the 21-year-old threw himself on the lawyer, grabbing him around the neck, trying to haul him over a table and appearing to kick him in the chest.

For his part in the Cantona incident Simmons was fined £500 for threatening behaviour and banned from all professional football grounds for 12 months. He was then jailed for seven days for contempt but was freed after only one day because he was due to be released on Sunday and prisons do not discharge inmates at weekends.

THE Football Association has fined Newcastle United's Colombian star, Faustino Asprilla, £10,000 and imposed a one-match ban after finding him guilty on two charges of misconduct arising from the elbowing and butting incidents involving Manchester City's Keith Curle in their match on February 24. Curle was cleared.

THE career of Diane Modahl, the former 800-metre Commonwealth champion, is firmly back on track. Having cleared her name over drugs charges after a battle lasting nearly two years, she added a further 800 metres victory to her name when she came first at Edinburgh's Meadowbank stadium.

Modhal finished in 2min 6.37sec, well below her personal best of 1:58.65 but comfortably ahead of the rest of the field. Scotland's Mary McClung, was second in 2:9.63.



THE second and final Test between New Zealand and West Indies ended in a tame draw at Antigua after the visitors failed to grab the challenging opportunity created by their bowler, Danny Morrison. He put them into contention with 5 for 66 in the home side's second innings as they were skittled out for a paltry 184. But once first innings century-maker Nathan Astle was out, New Zealand made no attempt to go for the 296 needed for victory.

The match, however, brought dubious honours for Morrison. When Curtly Ambrose dismissed him lbw without scoring, not only did he send him back to the pavilion but also straight into an unenviable place in the record books — for the highest number of ducks in Tests — beating the previous mark of 23 set by the Indian spinner, Bhagwat Chandrasekhar. Scores: West Indies 547-7 and 184; New Zealand 437 and 130-5.

MARK TODD, New Zealand's master horseman and double Olympic medallist, achieved his third Badminton triumph on Sunday in one of the tightest finishes in recent years. He collected the Mitsubishi Motors Trophy after the overnight leader, Scotland's Ian Stark, had two fences down in the jumping area.

The Kiwi rode a superb clear round on Bertie Blunt. Another New Zealander, Vaughn Jefferies, came second after a clear round on Bounce. Three other New Zealanders were in the top 10.

FORMER Manchester City chairman Peter Swales has died after suffering a series of heart attacks. He was 63. Swales was head of City for more than 20 years, from 1973 until a bitter takeover battle two years ago which left former City and England striker Francis Lee in control at Maine Road. During Swales's time, City won their last major trophy when they beat Newcastle in the 1976 League Cup final.

THE world of tennis was in mourning following the death of former American star Tim Gullikson, after a year-long battle against cancer of the brain.

Gullikson, who was 44, coached Pete Sampras to the position of world number one after enjoying a successful career in doubles with his twin brother, Tom. Gullikson won four singles and 16 doubles titles during the '70s and '80s. He quit the pro circuit in 1986 and coached Martina Navratilova, Mary Jo Fernandez and Aaron Krickstein before joining Sampras in 1992.

Rugby Union Pilkington Cup final: Bath 16 Leicester 15

Tigers pay the final penalty

Robert Armstrong

AN ANGRY two-handed push by Neil Back on the referee Steve Lander cast a long shadow over a highly unsatisfactory final that saw Bath chalk up their 10th success at Twickenham, a sour end to a controversial match.

Back's shove was seen on television seconds after the final whistle and may force the RFU to take disciplinary action against the Leicester and England flanker, notwithstanding his apology to Lander after the game.

The match was settled two minutes from time when Lander awarded Bath a penalty try following persistent infringement by the Leicester forwards. Lander had the option of issuing a yellow or a red card to the offenders but chose to impose what proved to be the ultimate sanction, enabling Jon Callard to kick the winning conversion.

Back, who refused to collect his losers' medal, insisted that he thought he was pushing Andy Robinson of Bath out of the way to get off the pitch, an explanation quickly accepted by Lander. Leicester's captain Dean Richards said: "Neil is amazed this has happened — he thought the referee was Robbo. I have seen Steve and he accepts it was a genuine mistake."

Cynics may suggest a cover-up was hastily cobbled together by Leicester and Lander to save bringing the game into further disrepute. However, there is no compelling reason to doubt the probity of Back, who has a reputation for discipline and sportsmanship second to none.

Though Lander regards the matter as closed, there is a loophole in the regulations under which the incident could come under fresh scrutiny. Steve Griffiths, the national referees development officer, said: "The citing procedure requires an official who witnessed the matter to provide evidence which could include video evidence. If that happened the matter would go through the appropriate disciplinary channels."

Whatever the outcome, Leicester, who scored two excellent tries through Malone and Poole, will inevitably consider they were robbed of the cup by the referee's whim. The storm of booing that greeted Bath as they climbed the steps to receive the trophy signalled a widespread perception that they were winners by default. Certainly it was a ragtag performance that clinched their fourth league and cup double.

In fact, the Tigers played virtually all the attacking football in the opening 20 minutes of each half. Malone's early try, which followed a defence-splitting dummy by the Irishman in front of the posts, was the best by a fly-half at Twickenham for many seasons, and had Liley not failed with four kickable penalties out of five, Leicester would have been out of sight by the middle of the second half.

Bath, who badly missed the powerful driving of their injured No 8 Ben Clarke, lived off scraps of possession and improvised some lively sorties under the prompting of Catt, but they lacked real conviction inside the Leicester 22 and never looked like crossing the line. Indeed, Bath seemed dead and buried six minutes from time when Poole stole a throw-in by Dawe and scored a splendid try following Back's clever grub kick to the right corner.

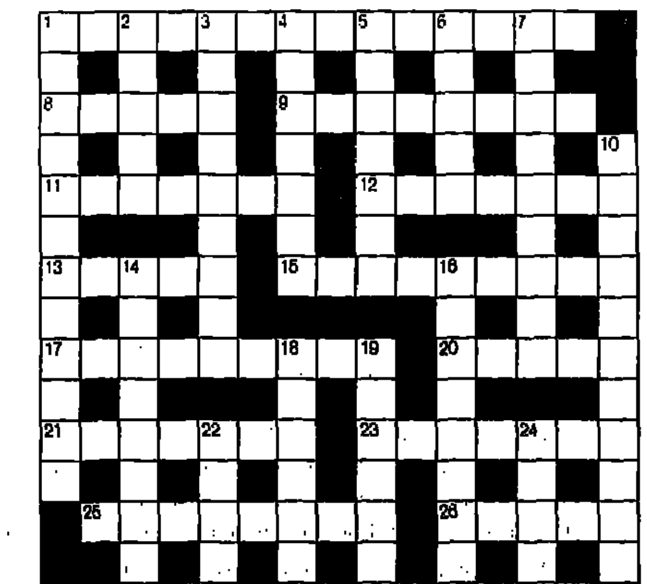
Overall, Leicester gave the more controlled and coordinated performance, putting Bath under pressure in the set-pieces and showing sound instincts in broken play, yet their inability to establish a two-score lead encouraged the holders to increase their scavenging around the fringes. Dawe, Mallett, Redman and Peters ensured that the formidable Leicester pack would not be allowed to enjoy complete domination no matter how long they spent camped in the Bath half.

"It took a massive team effort to come back from the dead, and not many sides could have done," said Brian Ashton, the Bath coach. "We'll make errors with our style of play but we are confident it will bring us more points than the other side. We have the right basis to make a strong challenge in next season's European Cup."

Leicester's prospects in Europe will depend partly on who they appoint as their new director of rugby after the recent dismissal of Tony Russ. An announcement is expected this week which could set the club on the path to the type of total rugby that ought to win more trophies.

● Pontypridd beat Neath 29-22 in Cardiff to take the Swalec Cup.

Cryptic crossword by Plodge



Across

1 At present, frequently having no puff, Albert is one character of 1 down,12 (4,2,4,4)
8 Go a bit over the top about oriental book (5)
9 Exercises in a Roman county such as Durham (8)
11 No finer composition was entertainingly towering (7)
12 see 1 down
13 Theatre doctor to be first person to introduce aromatherapy . . . (5)
15 . . . the quality of healing that calmed one in labour (9)
17 Two points to pitch in Ursa Minor (5,4)
20 Fortune teller's "thank you" for moonshine (5)
21 Name of Republican manipulator (7)
23 The ear was indeed swamped! (7)
25 Eccentrics don't begin in 11 the practice of pushy purveyors (4,4)
26 The lady of the manor? (5)
27 Guards and artillery follow canal river to joint English manoeuvres with the creator of 1 down,12 (7,7)

Down

1,12 Now, when will this tide turn to 27's classic? (3,4,2,3,7)
2 A dunderhead aspires to be snooty (5)
3 Dilly-dally from start to finish over careworn stretch (9)
4 Make fast the Irishman raised to the bar (3,4)
5 Admitted not a penny had been paid (7)
6 Mean dwelling lost value in the square as a lodging (5)
7 The farmer is below, in the passage on the right (9)
10 It's said to prove the rule for seated social workers (8,4)
14 The nose valve in a combustion engine (3,6)
16 Spies caught a nipper in Spain (9)
18 Rome convert in explosive Harrow (7)
19 No wet took part in glad refrain composed to be sung at conference (3,4)
22 Burdened Hutton when given notice (5)
24 Italian water policed by Dublin? (5)

Last week's solution

W	A	T	E	R	T	I	G	H	T	A	L	I	B	I
R		A		I		N		A		R		M		N
I	G	U	A	N	O	D	O	N		T	Y	P	E	S
S		N		G		I		D		E		E		U
T	O	T	E	M	I	C		S	E	M	I	N	A	R
W				E		E	M	U		I		D		A
A	D	V	E	R	T	S		P	A	S	S	I	O	N
T		A			A					L		N		C
C	A	L	L	O	U	S		R	E	F	U	G	E	E
H		E		P		A	D	A		R				B
S	E	N	S	U	A	L		N	E	I	T	H	E	R
T		T		L		U		K		S		E		O
R	A	I	S	E		T	H	I	N	K	T	A	N	K
A		N		N		E		N		E		R		E
P	R	E	S	T	I	D	I	G	I	T	A	T	O	R